City of Leominster

Comb & Carriage/French Hill Gateway Plus Action Plan

August 24, 2009

CONCORD SQUARE
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT, INC.

Development Cycles
Amherst, MA

City of Leominster – Comb & Carriage/French Hill Gateway Plus Action Plan

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Leominster was designated a Gateway City by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts along with 17 other cities across the state in 2009. A grant of $75,000 was awarded to each of these cities for the purpose of examining specific areas within each city to assess current conditions and develop recommendations on actions the city and/or other agencies and property owners can take to address problems identified, with the goal of stabilizing the neighborhood.

A consulting team comprised of Concord Square Planning & Development, Inc., Development Cycles, and the Twin Cities Community Development Corporation was assembled to perform this work. Concord Square was responsible for the research, analyses, and recommendations as well as the preparation of the final report and public presentation materials, while Development Cycles and the Twin Cities CDC were jointly responsible for the public outreach. The Leominster Office of Planning & Development provided support, acted as a liaison with other City Departments, and reviewed all materials throughout the project.

The City of Leominster chose to focus this study on the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood. Once a flourishing industrial center and single family residential area, the neighborhood has been in transition for decades. Several of the old factories have been renovated for other uses, such as residential or storage facilities. Others are still in industrial use and there are still some manufacturing uses in the neighborhood. Many of the neighborhood's larger homes have been converted into 2, 3, or 4 unit apartment buildings, and there are a number of larger apartment buildings as well.

Developed prior to the 1930's, about two thirds of the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood was laid out in a grid pattern for residential development, and portions have sidewalks. Originally street trees were planted along all streets, but over the years many of these have died or been trimmed or cut down as a result of conflicts with overhead wires or sidewalk damage. Many of the residents of the area were of French Canadian descent, and as has occurred all over the country, the ethnic composition of the neighborhood has changed over the years. The neighborhood is significantly more diverse than the City as a whole, with roughly a quarter of the households minority, compared with 15% citywide.

Public participation was an important element of this project from the beginning – actually, from several years prior to this planning effort. In 2006, the City's Office of Planning & Development conducted an outreach effort which included a neighborhood charette and culminated in a report titled *Comb & Carriage Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative.* For the current effort, over 60 residents, property owners, and City officials contributed to the project, providing valuable input to the consultant team. The findings of the current planning effort coincide well with the 2006 results, and the goals identified at that time led to the goal of the current work: to identify actions that can help stabilize and improve the neighborhood to create

a safer and more walkable environment that will encourage improvements in private property, including the re-use of old industrial buildings for residential and business use.

Section 1 of this report provides a brief introduction to the study area while Section 2 offers a detailed description of the existing conditions in the study area. Section 3 presents the recommendations developed by Concord Square through working with the City, the residents, and Development Cycles. Section 4 provides a thorough review of the zoning, both current and the proposed overlay districts being considered at the time of this study. Section 5 offers a summary of the funding options available for infrastructure improvements, with more details presented in Appendix A. Section 6 summarizes the public participation conducted for this study, and Appendices B, C, and D include supporting material from the outreach efforts.

After a careful study of the existing conditions in the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood, Concord Square concluded that housing conditions are generally good throughout the area, although as typical, they range from uninhabitable (a few condemned properties) to properties in excellent condition. Concord Square also concluded, however, that the overall appearance of much of the neighborhood is lacking due to the unsightly interface of the public/private boundary – the street edge and sidewalks. It was also found that the entry from the neighborhood to downtown is unsightly and has poor pedestrian facilities, presenting a negative impression of the area and the downtown. Finally, a significant natural area along the edge of the neighborhood has largely been ignored, and presents a wonderful opportunity for a walking trail along Monoosnoc Brook.

The following is a summary of the recommendations made in this report.

- To improve the neighborhood through housing rehabilitation and land use:
  - Continue working with the Twin Cities CDC and other agencies, both state and local, to improve housing conditions for the few properties in the neighborhood identified as in poor or very poor condition. This includes the MA Attorney General's Office program utilizing the state Sanitary Code, as well as a partnership program with the Twin Cities CDC – the Housing Ownership Opportunity Program.
  - Consider facilitating the creation of a new Limited Liability Corporation to purchase properties in poor condition, renovating them, and reselling them to individuals, especially first time homebuyers.
  - Continue to support the Twin Cities CDC's purchase of and rehabilitation of the derelict property at 142 Water Street for conversion to affordable housing.
  - Work with the property owner of 34 Tremaine Street to provide guidance in their efforts to renovate the old wooden mill building for office and/or industrial space.

- Implement the Neighborhood Infrastructure Action Plan:
  - Construct sidewalks on all streets where none currently exist – on both sides where appropriate and on one side where traffic volumes are very low and/or where significant trees are present that would create insurmountable problems with sidewalk construction.
  - Install, reinstall, or repair granite curbing along all streets in the neighborhood, to provide a clear demarcation of the street edge. Where appropriate, install grass or landscaping in the strip between the curb and the sidewalk.
  - Rebuild or repair existing sidewalks as appropriate – some are hazardous due to excessive buckling from tree roots, while others are in good condition and need only minor repairs to isolated areas.
  - Repaint worn crosswalks and paint new ones at key intersections throughout the neighborhood.

- Implement the Downtown Gateway Action Plan:
  - Repair or rebuild sidewalks on Water Street from Monoosnoc Brook to Mechanic Street, including clear delineation of sidewalks in locations where parking areas require driving over the sidewalk.
  - Install new crosswalks with textured and painted surfaces at all intersections in this area.
  - Reconfigure the intersection of Water Street and Depot Square to narrow the street on Depot Square and create a pocket park to include a section of the Twin Cities Trail.
  - Create a pocket park on the old stone arch railroad bridge and the railroad right-way between Water Street and Mechanic Street (refer to plans by Brown, Richardson and Rowe, Inc. for the Gateway City Parks program).
  - In partnership with private owners, provide better delineation of entrances to parking lots and install small landscaped areas to improve the appearance and pedestrian safety of Water Street from Depot Square to Mechanic Street.

- Implement the Monoosnoc Brook Greenway Action Plan:
  - Construct new pathways down the slope from the neighborhood to the main trail along the brook, at Third Street, Sixth Street, and at Bachand Field.
  - Repair the concrete steps down the slope at Sixth Street, replacing the upper section which has fallen into serious disrepair.
  - Resurface the main trail along the brook on the neighborhood side of the brook, and repair sections in need on the mall side of the brook.
  - Install two pedestrian bridges across the brook, one at the end of Williams Street and one in the area of Spring Street where the existing paved access meets the trail.
  - Install textured and painted crosswalks and appropriate signage on Commercial Road at both trail entrances – at the existing entry by Home Depot and the currently informal entry near Bachand Field.

- Consider implementation of the following amendments to the current zoning:
  - Permit as of right renovation of structures in the Residence-B district to allow increase in size or conversion to two family on parcels of at least 6,500 square feet provided adequate off-street parking is provided.
  - Permit as of right renovation of structures in the Residence-C district to allow increase in size or conversion to two or three family on parcels of at least 5,000 square feet provided adequate off-street parking is provided.
  - Permit as of right renovation, rehabilitation, or redevelopment of any property with residential use in the Business B district on parcels of at least 5,000 square feet.
  - Clarify the zoning status of houses with two residential units that do not meet the current definition of "duplex house."

- Consider modifying the proposed zoning amendments prior to adoption to:
  - Permit as of right the development or redevelopment of any parcel in the Downtown Overlay District within the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood (at minimum) on parcels of at least 5,000 square feet that have 50 feet of frontage and eight foot side and rear setbacks.
  - Consider expanding the Downtown Overlay District to include the area between Whitney Street and Laurel Street, which is currently zoned Commercial.
  - Eliminate the contradictions in the Mechanic Street Overlay District regulations, Section 3B, regarding what regulations shall govern.
  - Permit as of right the development or redevelopment of any parcel in the Mechanic Street Overlay District within the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood on parcels of at least 5,000 square feet.

- Pursue funding for implementation of the infrastructure recommendations:
  - Maintain the municipal position of Grants Administrator as a full time position, to enhance the City's ability to find, apply for, and secure funding from a variety of sources to implement the various recommendations made for the neighborhood.
  - Pursue funding from the Gateway Cities implementation grants.
  - Adopt and maintain a city wide Capital Improvement Plan which is comprehensive in terms of types of work needed and general in terms of level of detail for individual projects to be completed. The CIP should cover a period of at minimum five years, and major work known to be needed within the next ten to twenty years should be identified as well.
  - Consider utilizing a general obligation bond for at least partial funding of the infrastructure improvements recommended in this report, given the likelihood of a positive impact on the City's tax revenues based on increased property values throughout the neighborhood with such improvements. The importance of completing all or nearly all of the recommended work cannot be overstressed, as piecemeal

improvements to the overall neighborhood will do little or nothing to improve values and therefore tax revenues.

- Consider utilizing betterments to provide funding for improvements, if other alternatives are not available and neighborhood property owners are in support of this funding mechanism.
- Seek regional prioritization of the infrastructure improvements in the study area, to bolster the possibility of receiving state and federal funds.
- Continue participation in the Commonwealth Capital program, to enhance the City's position in obtaining grants from the state.
- Establish a gift account pursuant to MGL Ch 44 Sec 53A, to provide a mechanism for private donations to the efforts the City and neighborhood plan to undertake within the neighborhood.

- Continue to work with neighborhood residents and organizations to publicize this report, these recommendations, and the potential positive impact implementation would have on property values and the overall appearance of the neighborhood, since a well informed public is an asset in seeking funding and implementing plans.
- Continue to work with other departments, agencies, and organizations to coordinate efforts on various projects that impact the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood, such as the Monoosnoc Brook Greenway Project.

Implementation of the recommendations in this report is expected to take three to five years, and keeping this action plan in the public's eye will be necessary to continue the sustained efforts that will be needed to accomplish the goal of improving and stabilizing the neighborhood. The potential benefits from full implementation to the Comb & Carriage/ French Hill neighborhood and the City of improved appearance of both streetscapes and private properties, pedestrian safety and mobility, and the resulting increase in property values cannot be ignored.

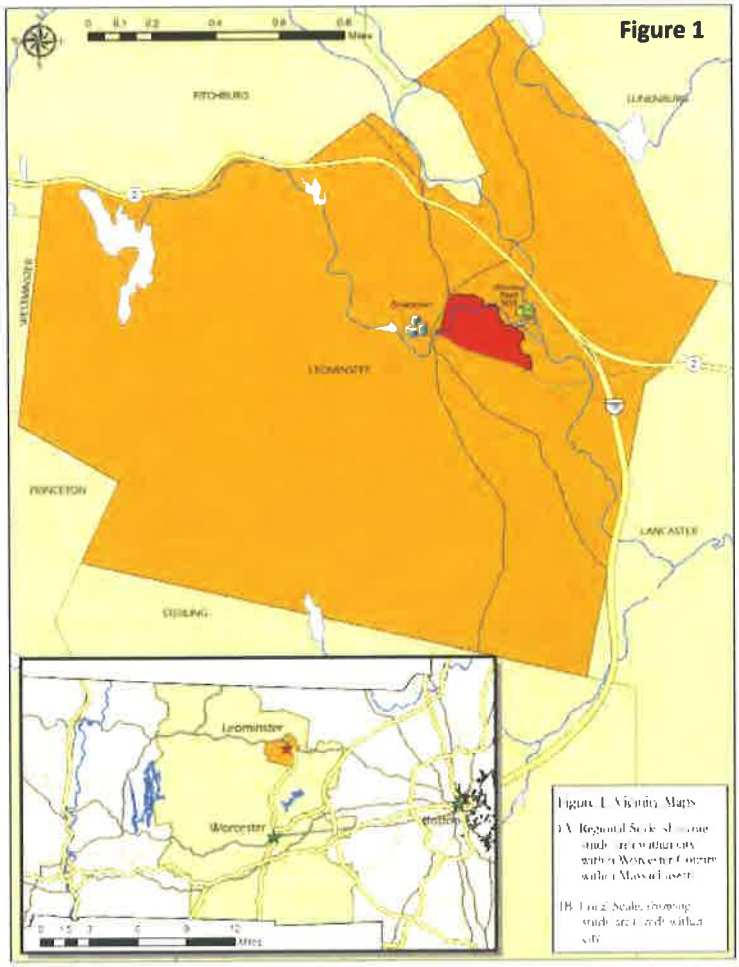
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Target Area

Leominster's Comb & Carriage/French Hill Neighborhood is located between the downtown and Whitney Field Mall, just off Route 2 and Route I-190 (see Figure 1). Historically, the Comb & Carriage Neighborhood was an industrial area where baby carriages and ladies hair combs were made. In 1958 F.W. Whitney and F.A. Whitney started to manufacture children's carriages. The shop eventually moved to Water Street to take advantage of the river. By the 1870s the business had began to take off and a bridge was built to aid in transporting materials across the river to the factory.

Comb & Carriage/French Hill was also one of the first places in the Country to enter the plastics industry. The plastics industry began in the mid-eighteen hundreds and the industry peaked in Leominster between 1900 and 1920 - the City's largest employer. Leominster manufactured a variety of plastic products including hair combs, toys, and buttons. The prominence of the plastics industry in the City has lead to two well-known manufacturers: Union Products, the creator of the pink flamingo lawn ornament and Foster Grant Company, the world's largest sunglasses manufacturer by the 1940s.

Worker housing was located in close proximity to the factories and many residents could walk from home to work. Today many of the manufacturing plants are gone, but there remains a substantial non-residential presence in sections of the neighborhood, primarily along Whitney Street. The amount of vacant and unusable industrial space in the district is 365,000 square feet or 62 percent of the total industrial space. This exceeds the rate of vacancy in all other industrial areas of the City. Of the 20 industrial buildings in the district, only 9 are currently occupied.



The neighborhood is roughly a 36 block (0.37 square mile) area bounded by Mechanic Street on the south, Main Street on the west, Mill and Bishop Streets and the Monoosnoc Brook on the North, and the continuation of the brook on the east. The Comb and Carriage/French Hill District lies just east of the downtown business district and abuts or includes a number of the City's key institutions including City Hall, the Public Library, churches for a number of different denominations, public and private Pre-K to 8 schools, the Spanish American Center, and numerous banks, retail, and commercial establishments. The majority of the area is residential, with single and two family residences and small multi-family buildings. There are two large scale multi-family developments within the study area as well an elderly public housing development. The Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood is home to about 3,600 of Leominster's 41,000 residents.

The City of Leominster was awarded a Gateway Plus grant to study the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood, which has a history of challenged properties. With the current recession, foreclosures were becoming evident and the City desired to address this and other issues within the neighborhood before conditions deteriorated further. The Gateway Plus grant provides assistance to neighborhoods in need of revitalization with support including identifying housing needs, minimizing the impacts of foreclosure, and developing action plans to stabilize and improve neighborhoods.

1.2 Goals of the Study

The goals of this study were to examine the demographics of the area and assess the current housing needs and anticipate future needs, examine the condition of the housing and non-residential buildings, and develop strategies to address buildings in poor condition. Furthermore, the study was to examine infrastructure throughout the neighborhood and identify issues that could provide disincentive to redevelopment or property improvements. Lastly, the study was to examine the regulatory framework and identify barriers to creation of affordable housing or property improvements, and examine recreational opportunities, especially related to the Monoosnoc Brook Greenway.

The Public Participation section of the report identifies several goals the neighbors see as most important. These goals include creating a safe and walkable neighborhood, help in creating re-use opportunities for old industrial buildings, reducing crime/drug activity, and improving existing housing stock.

1.3 Methodology

The process for this study can be broken into four major categories: 1) gathering data and general information; 2) conducting field surveys to assess conditions of structures and infrastructure; 3) meeting with the public to discuss the issues and get their thoughts on problem areas and ideas on potential solutions; and 4) developing recommendations to address the various issues identified.

An analysis of how the current zoning and proposed zoning amendments (as a result of this study) would impact the neighborhood was completed and recommendations were made on the zoning amendments in time for modification, if desired, prior to local adoption.

Public participation meetings were held three times to ensure the final plan met the needs of the residents. The first meeting was held after the field work was done and the second meeting was held once the recommendations were developed. A third public meeting was held in August to present the final report.

1.4 Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative

Public participation was an important element of this project from the beginning – actually, from several years prior to this planning effort. In 2006, the City's Office of Planning & Development conducted an outreach effort which culminated in a report titled Comb & Carriage Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative. That initiative involved a neighborhood charette where residents identified a number of strengths and weaknesses within the area, and prioritized potential improvements. The findings of the current planning effort coincide well with the 2006 results, with one exception: in 2006, drug activity was more prevalent and thus the highest priority for attendees was increasing law enforcement patrols to create a safer environment. While still an issue today, evidently the Leominster Police Department has done a good job over the past few years in curtailing at least some of the drug activity, since the attendees at the meetings this year did not seem to consider it such an overwhelming priority.

2 NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS

2.1 Study Area

As was seen in Figure 1, the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood is nestled between two major employment/shopping/service centers – Downtown Leominster and the Whitney Field Mall. With easy access to Route 2 and Interstate 190, the study area is well situated not only for people working within Leominster but for commuters traveling longer distances to other employment centers as well. Figure 2 (page 4) shows two bird's-eye view aerials of the study area, taken from the south. Map 1 (page 5) shows an overhead aerial of the study area, with parcels overlain. These figures make it easy to see the grid pattern of streets and the tree cover in this neighborhood.

This neighborhood was laid out prior to 1900 and largely developed prior to 1930, providing housing for the local mills and factories as the plastics industry flourished in Leominster. After a period of infill during the 1950's and 1960's, the neighborhood has been stable in regards to construction of buildings, but over the years many of the large older homes have been converted to two family or multi-family buildings. Many of these continue to be owner occupied, although there may be a trend toward non-local ownership of the larger buildings.

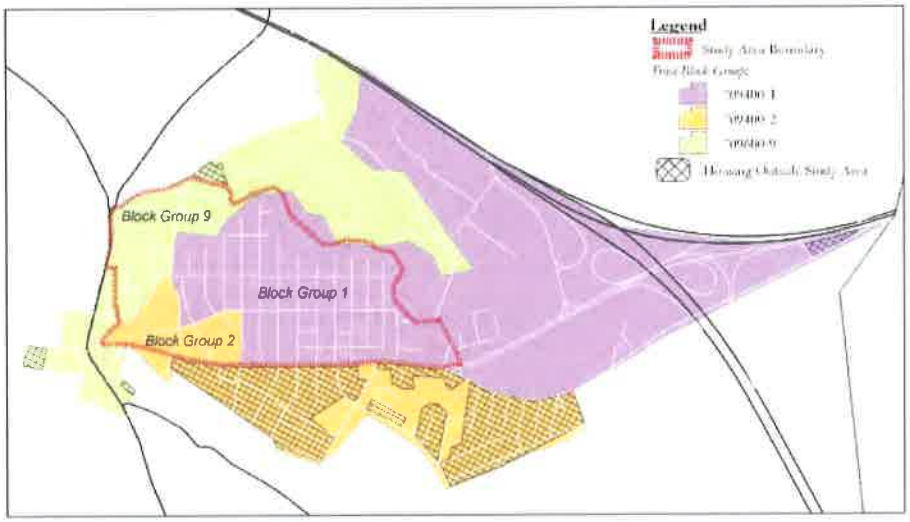


Figure 3: *Comparison of Census Block Groups to the study area.*

US Census delineations (tract, block group, and block) often provide a useful tool for comparing different geographic areas. However, there are limitations in matching Census boundaries to a small study area. In this neighborhood, the Census blocks match the study area boundaries and were used to provide accurate population counts, but the remainder of the data is only available at the block group level (or higher). Figure 3 shows the boundaries of the study area along with the block groups. A comparison using data from the Assessor's property database and the Census block groups provided the proportions of the number of housing units that are within the study area for each of the three block groups. Specifically, block group 400-1 includes only a few homes that are outside the study area, which is less than one tenth of one percent. In block group 600-9, 60% of the total housing stock is inside the study area, and in block group 400-2, only 19% of the total housing is within the study area. The consultants used their best judgment in the analysis and reporting of the following Census data.

2.2 Demographics

A summary of key demographic comparisons between the Comb & Carriage/ French Hill neighborhood and the City of Leominster include (all data comes from the 2000 US Census unless otherwise noted):

<u>Population & Age</u>

- The neighborhood is home to just under 3,600 residents or about nine percent of the city's population. Figure 4 (page 7) shows the population density for the study area; note that many of the blocks in the western portion have many industrial or commercial uses, whereas the blocks in the central and eastern portions of the study area are almost entirely residential.

Figure 2: *Bird's-eye view of neighborhood; top shows east and central, bottom shows west.*

City of Leominster MA
Gateway Plus Grant

Comb & Carriage/French Hill
Aerial View

1 inch = 400 feet

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Figure 4

- The median age of residents in this neighborhood is 4.3 years younger than the median for the city (32.0 compared to 36.3 years for Leominster in 2000).
- 25 percent of the neighborhood population is under 18 (26.3 percent for the city) while 14 percent is over 65 year old (13.5 percent citywide).
- 32.5 percent of households include children under 18. Citywide, 34 percent of households have children under 18.

Ethnicity and Country of Origin

- Based on 2007 Census estimates, the neighborhood consists of nearly 25 percent minority households compared to 15 percent for Leominster as a whole.
- 14.9 percent of Comb & Carriage/ French Hill residents are foreign born compared to 10.4 percent citywide.

Family Status

- 14.7 percent of households in the neighborhood are married couple families with children compared to 22.7 percent citywide.
- 44.6 percent of married couple families have both parents working compared to 62.4 percent for the city as a whole.
- 10.5 percent of households are occupied by single-mother households with children compared to 8.6 percent for all of Leominster.

Income and Poverty

- With an estimated median household income of $29,400 in 1999, the neighborhood's median income was $15,500 below the median for Leominster ($44,900) and $21,100 below the median for the State as a whole ($50,500).
- 16.3 percent of the population live below the poverty level compared to 9.5 percent citywide.
- A 2009 estimate of renter households by Area Median Income (AMI) indicates that nearly 85 percent of neighborhood renters earn less than 80 percent of AMI compared to 67 percent citywide.
- Although the current recession may have had a significant impact on employment, in 2000 8 percent of the city's total workforce and 11 percent of the city's unemployed lived in the study area.
- In 2000, a slightly higher percentage of the workforce population within the study area were unemployed compared to the city as a whole (6 versus 4 percent).

2.3 Housing Statistics

The study area includes 565 residential properties ranging from single family to multi-family with 175 units. Table 1 and Figures 5 and 6 show the breakdown of

Table 1

	# of Properties	*# of Units*
Total Housing:	565	1,673
Single Family:	215	215
Two-Family:	154	308
Three Units:	100	300
Four – Seven Units:	84	413
Eight or More Units:	10	419
Boarding Houses:	2	18

Figure 5

Housing Type by Number of Properties

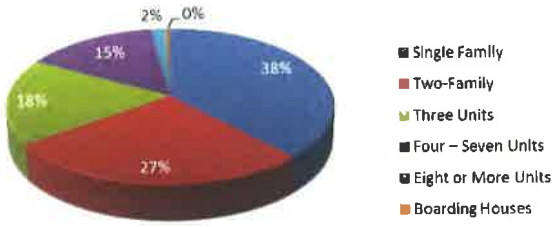
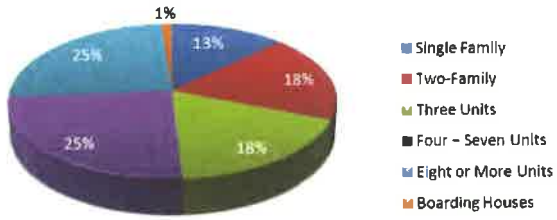


Figure 6

Housing Type by Number of Units



these properties, and Map 2 (page 9) shows the distribution of residential uses throughout the neighborhood.

The following is a summary of housing statistics (2000 census data unless noted otherwise):

Housing Occupancy and Tenure

- In 2000, there were 2.00 persons per household (pph) in the study area compared to 2.44 citywide. Breaking this down by owner and renter occupancy, the study area pph for owner units was 2.50 compared to 2.68 citywide, and the pph for renter units was 2.00 for the study area compared to 1.96 citywide.
- 30 percent of households own their own home compared to 58 percent citywide. Owner occupancy increases from under 30 percent in the western section and approaches 40 percent in the most eastern section of the neighborhood.
- 70% of households within the target area rent their home, compared to 42% citywide.
- 10% of the owner occupied units within the neighborhood are occupied by people classifying themselves as non-white, compared to only 5% citywide; conversely 15% of the renters in the neighborhood classify themselves as non-white compared to 18% citywide.
- The median length of stay in both rental and homeownership units in this neighborhood is one year longer than for the city as a whole.

Rents and Sale Values

- The median gross rent in the neighborhood in 2007 was $643/ month compared to $730/ month for the city as a whole.
- The estimated 2007 value of a single-family detached home in the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood was $208,550 or two-thirds the median value for single-family detached homes in Leominster generally. For three and four-family homes the median value was $283,868 in the neighborhood and $264, 572 for the city. For larger multi-family properties median value equaled $243,021 in the neighborhood and $191,907 citywide.
- In 2009, the mean assessed value (from the City Assessor's data) for single family homes in the study area was $201,095; for two family was $245,022 (or $122,511 per unit); for three family was $278,253 (or $92,751 per unit); and for 4+ family buildings was $302,973 (or $59,734 per unit). The mean value for all residential properties not including the major apartment complexes (La Pierre elderly housing, Whitney Carriage, and Waterway Apartments) is $244,649, and the total assessed value is $135.7 million. Map 3 (page 11) shows the geographic distribution of housing values per unit; the number within each parcel is the number of units on that parcel.
- For homes on the market with MLS on July 15, 2009 the median single-family home in the neighborhood was listed at $195,900 compared to a citywide median of $243,000. For multi-family properties the median price asked was $173,050 within the neighborhood and $239,900 citywide.

City of Leominster MA
Gateway Plus Grant

Comb & Carriage/French Hill
Residential Land Use

Single family house

Two family house

Four to eight family house

Multi-family complex: (Whitney Carriage)

Legend

- Study Area Boundary
- Parcels

Land Use:

- Single Family
- 2-3 Units
- Multi-Family
- Boarding House
- Vacant Land
- Municipal
- Non-residential
- ROW

Sources:

Leominster DPW, Assessor
MassGIS

1 inch = 400 feet

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City of Leominster MA
Gateway Plus Grant
Comb & Carriage/French Hill
Residential Assessed Values

Legend

- Study Area Boundary
- Parcels

Assessed Value Per Unit:

- 0 to 50K
- 50 to 100K
- 100 to 150K
- 150 to 200K
- 200 to 250K
- Above 250K

Notes:

1. *Does not include the large apartment complexes or any non-residential uses.*
2. *Number is the number of units on the parcel.*

Sources:
Leominster DPW; Assessor's Office; MassGIS

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2.4 Foreclosures and Property Conditions

Leominster, like most communities in the nation, has seen the number of properties going into foreclosure increase over the past year or so as people continue to struggle with the recession. Leominster ranked 20th in the state for the number of foreclosures in Fiscal Year 2008, with 142 citywide; the state had 17,618 foreclosures during that period. The Comb & Carriage/ French Hill neighborhood had 9 foreclosures in Block Group 1 of Census Tract 709400, which covers the majority of the study area. Block Group 2 of the same Tract had 5 foreclosures, but only 19% of the housing units in the Block Group are within the study area; it is not possible to determine from this data whether the foreclosures were in the study area or not. As of July 31, 2009, Mass Housing Partnership was reporting that Leominster was not in the top 20 communities in the state for foreclosures by any of their measurements (municipality, census block, zip code, etc.; article by Tim Davis posted on MHP website). Figure 7 shows one of the foreclosed properties in the study area.

Figure 7: *A foreclosed property.*

As of April 2009, 12% of the properties on the City's vacant properties list were in this neighborhood. In addition to these, Concord Square has identified 29 properties which are in poor condition – 8 are in very poor condition and need significant renovation or replacement, and 21 are in moderate to poor condition and need basic improvements such as painting, minor repairs to porches, steps, and/or walkways, or parking/landscaping. Figure 8 shows a property rated in poor condition, and Figure 9 shows a property rated moderate. These assessments were made based on field surveys of the entire neighborhood, and only account for the exterior conditions – interior condition surveys are beyond the scope of this study. These properties are shown on Map 4 (page 15). Note that three properties are listed in two categories – both the "worst" properties category and the City vacant properties list; they are shown on the map in red along with the other "worst" properties.

The properties shown on Map 4 are those that are either already or are thought to be the most likely to fall into disrepair, and could be subject to abandonment if the owner falls into serious financial distress. An analysis was also done to identify the non-local property owners, as resident input at the public meetings indicated concerns about such properties generally being neglected and falling into disrepair.

Map 5 (page 17) shows both the non-local property ownership and the property issues (condition of structure, on City's vacant list). Non-local ownership is broken into two categories: "Leominster", which are owners with mailing addresses outside the study area but within the City, and "non-Leominster, which are owners with mailing addresses outside Leominster (from as far away as California). Of the 143 non-locally owned properties, 49 are either single or two family and 94 are buildings with three or more units. Non-local Leominster owners control 63 properties with 207 units, and non-Leominster owners control 80 properties with 271 units.

Figure 8: *Example of a property in poor condition.*

Figure 9: *Example of a property rated moderate.*

Map 5 also shows seven properties that are possible foreclosures based on the Assessor records for Grantee. All but two are also on the City's vacant list; those two are parcel 167-57, a single family home at 168 Tenth Street, and parcel 39-3, a three family building at 128 First Street.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that throughout the City, properties that go into foreclosure and are in reasonable condition are quickly sold and re-occupied. There are several properties in the neighborhood that are in such poor condition that foreclosure has simply meant abandonment with little hope of resale on the open market. In these cases, the City is working toward resolution for the benefit of the neighborhood – see Section 3.1 for additional information.

2.5 Nonresidential Buildings and Uses

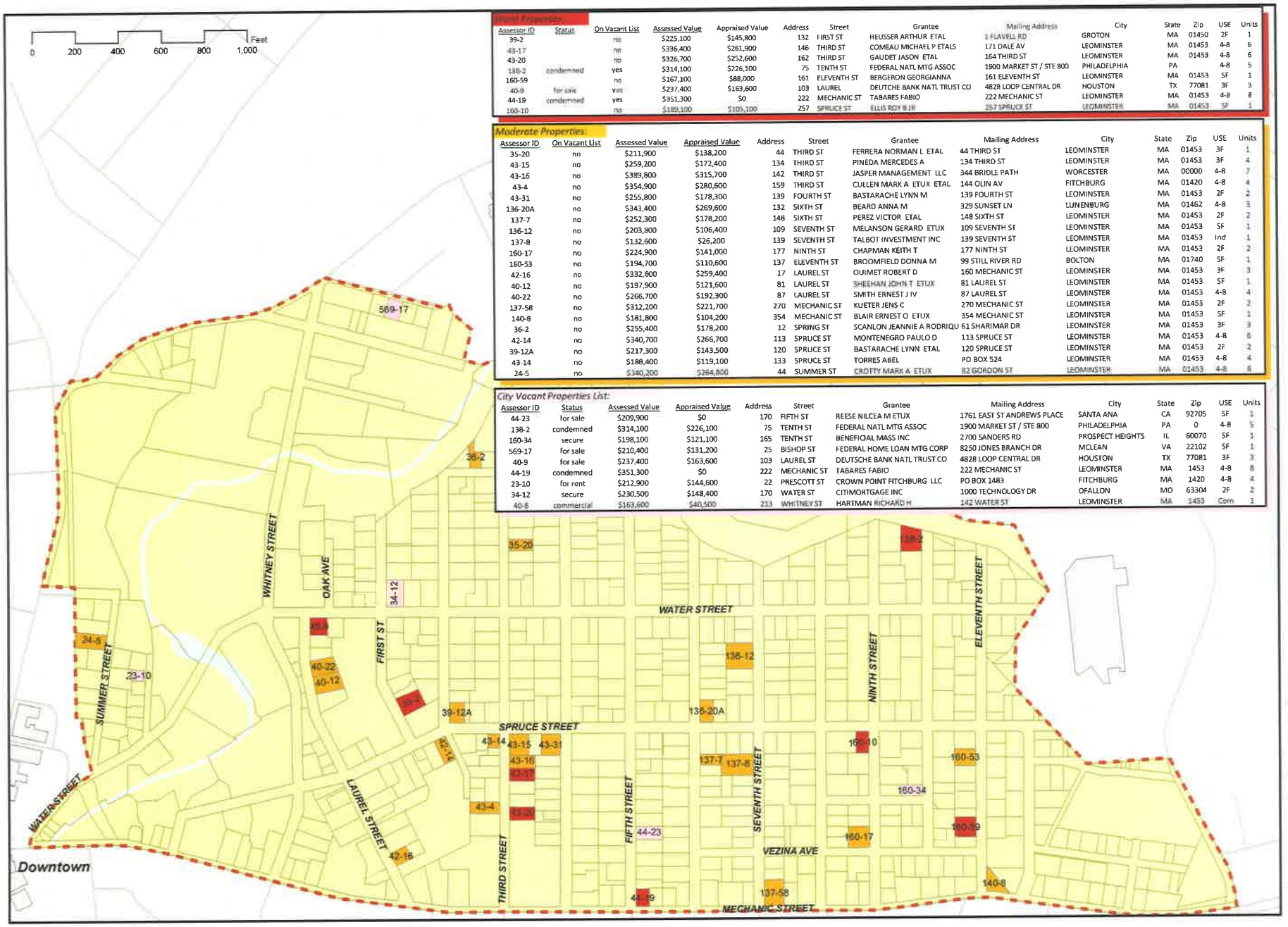
As was stated in the introduction, the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood is a mixed use area. Map 6 (page 19) shows the land uses by broad categories, and clearly shows the extent of the non-residential uses, which vary from institutional such as churches to industrial manufacturing plants. Out of the 669 parcels that are in either residential or nonresidential use, 67, or 10%, are nonresidential. These nonresidential uses occupy just under one third of the developable land area, with 55.7 acres out of 181.4 (does not include permanent open space or rights-of-way).

Nonresidential uses in the study area include:

- Institutional
  - Religious
  - Social service organizations
  - Developmentally disabled residence and services
- Commercial
  - Retail stores
  - Restaurants
  - Offices
  - Financial institution
  - Auto salvage yard
- Industrial
  - Warehouses
  - Manufacturing

Most of the buildings used for nonresidential purposes are older and some show signs of the need for updating. Both the Whitney Carriage housing development and the Waterway Place Apartment complex are renovated mills, and are in excellent condition with the constant attention they receive. Many other buildings have been maintained in good condition by their owners, and several buildings in the area have seen major improvements in recent years:

- 39 Spruce Street, a wood frame building with vinyl siding used as a warehouse and moving company (Bolio & Sargents), had extensive façade renovations made and the owner is trying to secure funding for lead paint and asbestos abatement in some portions of the building.
- 40 Spruce Street, a brick mill type of building which has undergone extensive renovation on a major portion of the building. Additional areas will be renovated as financial resources allow. This building is being divided into a number of units for smaller businesses; spaces are available for lease at this time.
- 126 Mechanic Street, a 14,400 square foot structure was renovated into a small shopping center with several businesses, including a computer store and repair shop, an auto parts store, and a discount store.



Vacant Properties:

Assessor ID	Status	On Vacant List	Assessed Value	Appraised Value	Address	Street	Grantee	Mailing Address	City	State	Zip	USE	Units
39-2		no	$225,100	$145,800	132	FIRST ST	HEUSSER ARTHUR ETAL	1 FLAVELL RD	GROTON	MA	01450	2F	1
43-17		no	$336,400	$261,900	146	THIRD ST	COMEAU MICHAEL P ETALS	171 DALE AV	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	4-8	6
43-20		no	$326,700	$252,600	162	THIRD ST	GAUDET JASON ETAL	164 THIRD ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	4-8	6
138-2	condemned	yes	$314,100	$226,100	75	TENTH ST	FEDERAL NATL MTG ASSOC	1900 MARKET ST / STE 800	PHILADELPHIA	PA		4-8	5
160-59		no	$167,100	$88,000	161	ELEVENTH ST	BERGERON GEORGIANNA	161 ELEVENTH ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	SF	1
40-9	for sale	yes	$237,400	$163,600	103	LAUREL	DEUTCHE BANK NATL TRUST CO	4828 LOOP CENTRAL DR	HOUSTON	TX	77081	3F	3
44-19	condemned	yes	$351,300	$0	222	MECHANIC ST	TABARES FABIO	222 MECHANIC ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	4-8	8
160-10		no	$189,100	$105,100	257	SPRUCE ST	ELLIS ROY B JR	257 SPRUCE ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	SF	1

Moderate Properties:

Assessor ID	On Vacant List	Assessed Value	Appraised Value	Address	Street	Grantee	Mailing Address	City	State	Zip	USE	Units
35-20	no	$211,900	$138,200	44	THIRD ST	FERRERA NORMAN L ETAL	44 THIRD ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	3F	1
43-15	no	$259,200	$172,400	134	THIRD ST	PINEDA MERCEDES A	134 THIRD ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	3F	4
43-16	no	$389,800	$315,700	142	THIRD ST	JASPER MANAGEMENT LLC	344 BRIDLE PATH	WORCESTER	MA	00000	4-8	7
43-4	no	$354,900	$280,600	159	THIRD ST	CULLEN MARK A ETUX ETAL	144 OLIN AV	FITCHBURG	MA	01420	4-8	4
43-31	no	$255,800	$178,300	139	FOURTH ST	BASTARACHE LYNN M	139 FOURTH ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	2F	2
136-20A	no	$343,400	$269,600	132	SIXTH ST	BEARD ANNA M	329 SUNSET LN	LUNENBURG	MA	01462	4-8	3
137-7	no	$252,300	$178,200	148	SIXTH ST	PEREZ VICTOR ETAL	148 SIXTH ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	2F	2
136-12	no	$203,800	$106,400	109	SEVENTH ST	MELANSON GERARD ETUX	109 SEVENTH ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	SF	1
137-8	no	$132,600	$26,200	139	SEVENTH ST	TALBOT INVESTMENT INC	139 SEVENTH ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	Ind	1
160-17	no	$224,900	$141,000	177	NINTH ST	CHAPMAN KEITH T	177 NINTH ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	2F	2
160-53	no	$194,700	$110,600	137	ELEVENTH ST	BROOMFIELD DONNA M	99 STILL RIVER RD	BOLTON	MA	01740	SF	1
42-16	no	$332,600	$259,400	17	LAUREL ST	OUIMET ROBERT D	160 MECHANIC ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	3F	3
40-12	no	$197,900	$121,600	81	LAUREL ST	SHEEHAN JOHN T ETUX	81 LAUREL ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	SF	1
40-22	no	$266,700	$192,300	87	LAUREL ST	SMITH ERNEST J IV	87 LAUREL ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	4-8	4
137-58	no	$312,200	$221,700	270	MECHANIC ST	KUETER JENS C	270 MECHANIC ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	2F	2
140-8	no	$181,800	$104,200	354	MECHANIC ST	BLAIR ERNEST O ETUX	354 MECHANIC ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	SF	1
36-2	no	$255,400	$178,200	12	SPRING ST	SCANLON JEANNIE A RODRIQU	61 SHARIMAR DR	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	3F	3
42-14	no	$340,700	$266,700	113	SPRUCE ST	MONTENEGRO PAULO D	113 SPRUCE ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	4-8	6
39-12A	no	$217,300	$143,500	120	SPRUCE ST	BASTARACHE LYNN ETAL	120 SPRUCE ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	2F	2
43-14	no	$188,400	$119,100	133	SPRUCE ST	TORRES ABEL	PO BOX 524	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	4-8	4
24-5	no	$340,200	$264,800	44	SUMMER ST	CROTTY MARK A ETUX	82 GORDON ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	01453	4-8	6

City Vacant Properties List:

Assessor ID	Status	Assessed Value	Appraised Value	Address	Street	Grantee	Mailing Address	City	State	Zip	USE	Units
44-23	for sale	$209,900	$0	170	FIFTH ST	REESE NILCEA M ETUX	1761 EAST ST ANDREWS PLACE	SANTA ANA	CA	92705	SF	1
138-2	condemned	$314,100	$226,100	75	TENTH ST	FEDERAL NATL MTG ASSOC	1900 MARKET ST / STE 800	PHILADELPHIA	PA	0	4-8	5
160-34	secure	$198,100	$121,100	165	TENTH ST	BENEFICIAL MASS INC	2700 SANDERS RD	PROSPECT HEIGHTS	IL	60070	SF	1
569-17	for sale	$210,400	$131,200	25	BISHOP ST	FEDERAL HOME LOAN MTG CORP	8250 JONES BRANCH DR	MCLEAN	VA	22102	SF	1
40-9	for sale	$237,400	$163,600	103	LAUREL ST	DEUTSCHE BANK NATL TRUST CO	4828 LOOP CENTRAL DR	HOUSTON	TX	77081	3F	3
44-19	condemned	$351,300	$0	222	MECHANIC ST	TABARES FABIO	222 MECHANIC ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	1453	4-8	8
23-10	for rent	$212,900	$144,600	22	PRESCOTT ST	CROWN POINT FITCHBURG LLC	PO BOX 1483	FITCHBURG	MA	1420	4-8	4
34-12	secure	$230,500	$148,400	170	WATER ST	CITIMORTGAGE INC	1000 TECHNOLOGY DR	OFALLON	MO	63304	2F	2
40-8	commercial	$163,600	$40,500	213	WHITNEY ST	HARTMAN RICHARD H	142 WATER ST	LEOMINSTER	MA	1453	Com	1

City of Leominster MA
Gateway Plus Grant

Comb & Carriage/French Hill
Distressed Property Issues
Property Data for Select Sites

Legend

- Study Area Boundary
- Parcels

Property Issues:

- Building - Severe
- Building - Moderate
- City Vacant List

Properties are labeled with the Assessor ID number.

Sources:

City of Leominster: Parcels, Vacant Property List

1 inch = 400 feet

July 19, 2009

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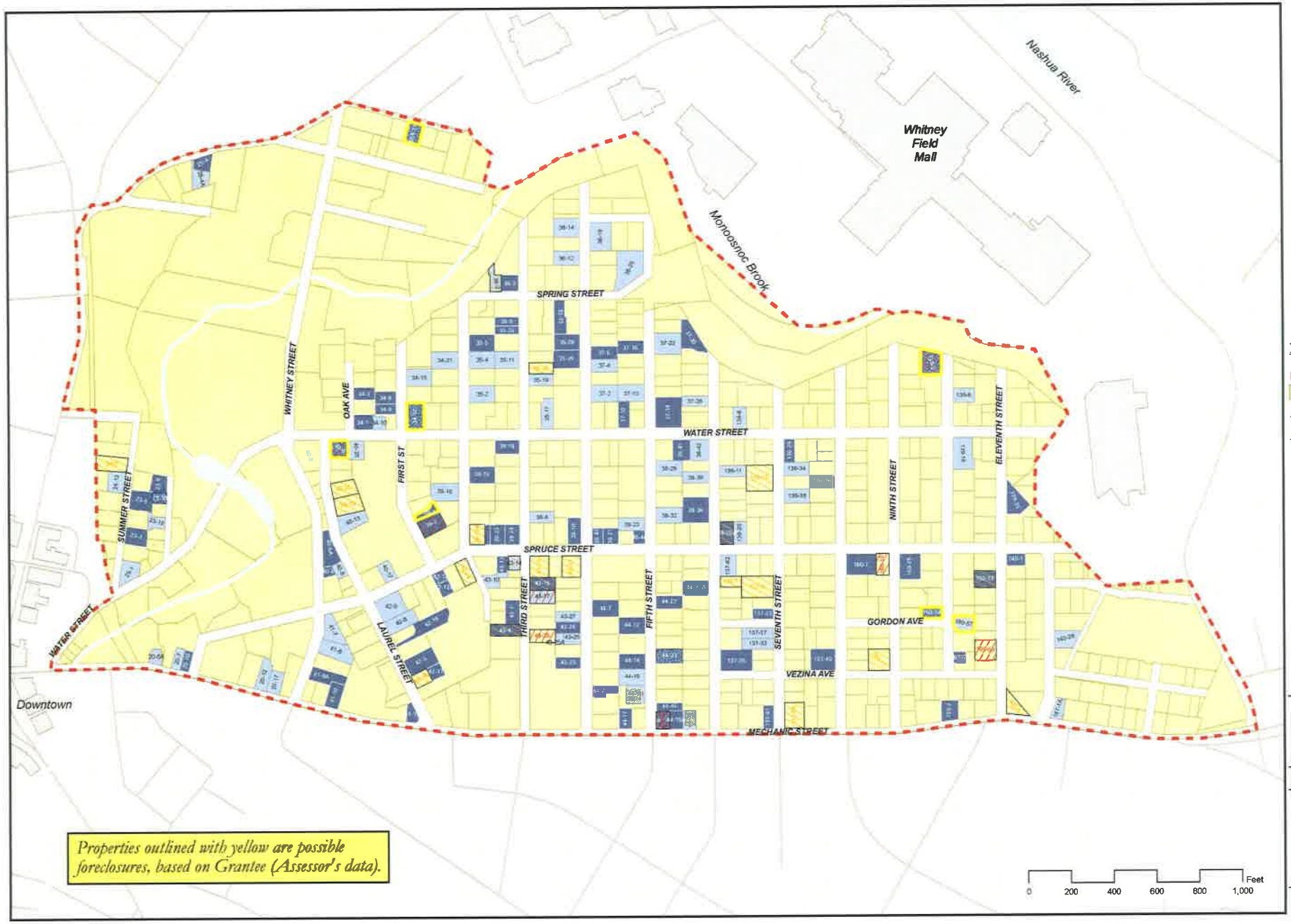

City of Leominster MA
Gateway Plus Grant

Comb & Carriage/French Hill
Housing Issues
Non-Local Owners and Possible Foreclosures

Legend

Study Area Boundary

Parcels

Non-local landlords identified by location of owner, using Assessor data (see note):

Leominster
63 Properties
207 Housing Units

Non-Leominster
80 Properties
271 Housing Units

Total 143 Properties with 478 Housing Units

Property Issues:

Building Condition - Moderate

Building Condition - Severe

On City Vacant List

Properties are labeled with the Assessor ID number.

"Leominster" owners are those with mailing addresses within the city but outside the study area.

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City of Leominster MA
Gateway Plus Grant
Comb & Carriage/French Hill
Current Land Use


174 Spruce Street


3 Seventh Street

Monoosnoc Brook
SPRING STREET
WHITNEY STREET
OAK AVE
WATER STREET
ELEVENTH STREET
NINTH STREET
FIRST ST
SUMMER STREET
SPRUCE STREET
THIRD STREET
FIFTH STREET
SEVENTH STREET
GORDON AVE
LAUREL STREET
VEZINA AVE
MECHANIC STREET
Downtown


Corner of Mechanic and Water Streets


40 Spruce Street

0 200 400 600 800 1,000 Feet

Legend

- Study Area Boundary
- Parcels

Current Land Use:

- Residential
- Nonresidential
- Open Space
- Vacant
- Roads
- Nonresidential Buildings

Sources:
Leominster DPW; Assessor's Office; MassGIS

1 inch = 400 feet

July 22, 2009

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- 174 Spruce Street, a neighborhood grocery store (Desilet's Market & Deli) that has been in operation since 1948, had major façade improvements made through the Leominster Storefront Improvement Program several years ago.
- 309 Whitney Street, a wood frame mill building which has undergone extensive renovations.

Other properties have been neglected to one extent or another. The worst of these include:

- 142 Water Street (Figure 10), which has both an historic wooden mill structure and a large masonry and metal structure, both of which are in such bad condition that the Fire Department has designated them as "no entry" structures and which are eyesores in the neighborhood. A portion of the building is currently used as a warehouse.

Figure 10: *142 Water Street*

- 34 Tremaine Street (Figure 11), an old wooden mill building which is currently vacant. The owner has recently approached the Planning Office with plans to renovate the building for commercial and/or industrial space.
- 37 Ninth Street, which is an auto salvage yard comprising five parcels in the northeastern area of the neighborhood. Other than a charitable organization, the surrounding properties are residential. Figure 12 shows a bird's-eye view of this area. In operation since 1926, this is a long standing land use.

2.6 Existing Infrastructure

As was stated earlier, the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood was laid out many years ago in a grid pattern, which lends itself to easy navigation by both vehicles and pedestrians. By and large the existing infrastructure is in good condition, with some exceptions. The primary focus of this portion of the study was on sidewalks, lighting, and parks; the roads, water, sewer, and storm water drainage infrastructure is generally in reasonable condition. A section of water main in Whitney Street is being replaced this year. Map 7 (page 25) shows the existing conditions of the sidewalks and lighting in the neighborhood, as determined through field visits by Concord Square. It should be noted that the conditions were determined for each street segment (block) and averaged for the both the length of the block and both sides of the street. Also note there are many areas where the sidewalk is in reasonable condition but there is no curb to define the street edge (shown by a green line outlined with red).

Figure 11: *34 Tremaine Street*

Figure 12: *37 North Street*

There are several areas warranting additional discussion:

- A section of sidewalk on Fourth Street is in such poor condition as to be hazardous to pedestrians and impassable by handicapped people. Figure 13 shows a photo of this area between Spring Street and Water Street. In the photo, it is evident that several large trees were removed, apparently the roots were the cause of the sidewalk buckling.

- A short section of asphalt sidewalk on Oak Avenue is also in extremely poor condition and many people would choose to walk in the street rather than on this segment of sidewalk (Figure 14).

- One of the more common problems identified is the lack of definition of the street edge, which combined with the narrow streets with parking on both sides leads to vehicles being parked on the grass strip between the street and sidewalk, which leads to mud puddles, loss of grass, and a messy appearance. Figure 15 shows this on Second Street.

Figure 13: *Sidewalk on Fourth Street.*

Figure 14: *Sidewalk on Oak Avenue.*

- In some areas, there is no grass strip – either it has been paved over to eliminate the constant mud puddles or the sidewalk was constructed directly adjacent to the street. In these areas it is not uncommon to see vehicles parked on the sidewalk, which is not legal but again, due to the narrow streets and parking on both sides, is fairly common. Figure 16 shows this on Third Street.

Figure 15: *Encroachment on grass strip.*

- The neighborhood is generally well lit at appropriate levels, although three areas were identified during a night time survey as needing additional lighting – either existing light fixtures are inadequate for the area or they are in need of maintenance. These areas are shown on Map 7 and include sections of Water Street, Whitney Street, and Williams Street.

Parks within the neighborhood include:

- Carter Park, on Main Street and Summer Street, is 2.2 acres and includes a Civil War Memorial and a gazebo (see Figure 17). During summer months, concerts are performed here. The Twin Cities Trail will pass through the park when completed; the rail right-of-way traverses the park but easements have been granted for City use. This park is in good condition and is well maintained by the

City, although some residents feel additional lighting would extend the hours it can be used and improve safety within the park.

- Bachand Field, off Twelfth Street, is about 3.5 acres and is home to the Little League. The field includes three baseball fields (one with lights), restrooms, a concession stand, and some paved parking. During busy times of the season, parking at the field is inadequate and people have to park their vehicles on local streets in the area, in some cases creating potential hazards given the narrow street, the curve on Twelfth Street, and lack of sidewalks.

Figure 16: *Encroachment on sidewalk.*

- French Hill Park (a.k.a. Laurie J. Cormier Park) is at the corner of Water Street and Third Street on a 0.12 acre parcel. This pocket park has walkways, flowers, ornamental trees, and benches. Maintained by the City, it is in good condition.

- Third Street Playground & Water Park (Louis Charpentier Playground) is on a .34 acre parcel on Third Street behind St. Cecilia's Church (Figure 18). This park was built in 1999 and has a handicapped accessible playground, a water play feature, benches, and a picnic table. These facilities are in good condition.

The City also owns over 15 acres along the Monoosnoc Brook on the northeastern edge of the neighborhood, which has an informal trail on the neighborhood side (along a sewer line, see Figure 19) which could be developed into a more accessible and attractive passive recreation area. There are several informal paths leading down the steep hill from the neighborhood to the trail, and one set of concrete stairs which date back to the 1930's when a City recreation area including a swimming pool was located in Whitney Field. These stairs have fallen into disrepair and need attention to be safe to use again (see Figure 20). There are numerous spots along the trail that have been used as dumping grounds by residents or others; some nothing more than yard debris but in other areas washing machines, car parts, electronic equipment, and other trash are evident (Figure 21). The trail itself is kept in fairly good

Figure 17: *Carter Park*

Figure 18: *Louis Charpentier Playground*

condition as a by-product of the City ensuring access to the sewer line upon which the trail lies. Other than that, no maintenance is done and minimal attention is paid to this area.

Figure 19: *Main trail along neighborhood side of Monsoosnoc Brook.*

Figure 20: *Steps providing access at Sixth Street.*

Figure 21: *Example of trash and debris dumped along hillside.*

City of Leominster MA
Gateway Plus Grant

Comb & Carriage/French Hill
Neighborhood Infrastructure
Existing Conditions

Legend

- Study Area Boundary
- Parcels
- Parks
- River or Brook
- Path

*Condition of Sidewalk: **

- Good
- Good But No Curb
- Moderate
- Poor
- No Sidewalk

*Other Infrastructure Needs: **

- Inadequate Street Lights

** As determined by CSPC+D based on field surveys in April and May 2009.*

Sources:
Leominster DPW, Assessor
MassGIS

1 inch = 400 feet

July 24, 2009

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3 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Housing Recommendations

The conclusion Concord Square arrived at is that housing in this neighborhood, while perhaps the worst in the City, is by and large in good shape as compared to other cities in the Commonwealth. Out of well over 500 residential properties, only a handful – five percent – are in moderate or poor condition. Of those, only 9, or less than two percent of the neighborhoods residential properties, are in poor condition. With figures like this, small actions by the City or others can make a significant difference in the neighborhood.

The City has already begun to research and work with various agencies and non-profit organizations to address the worst properties identified in this study. The City has worked with the Twin Cities Community Development Corporation on a number of projects over the years, and more recently there has been an increased effort within the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood to assist residents to purchase or remain in their homes.

The City has begun working with the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office, which has a program that municipalities can use to address properties with sanitary code violations that are not addressed by the property owner. As part of the Attorney General's Abandoned Housing Initiative, this receivership program operates under the State Sanitary Code (specifically MGL Ch. 111 Sec. 127I), and allows a municipality to work with local receivers (can be profit or non-profit, individual or organization) to gain control of a property and perform necessary repairs, with the goal of eliminating sanitary code violations which presumably will improve the property and reduce or eliminate negative impacts on abutters and the neighborhood. Leominster City officials are currently working with the Attorney General's Office on one foreclosed and abandoned property within the neighborhood, a 5 unit apartment building at 75 Tenth Street which was condemned by the City in 2008. This property is listed on the City's vacant property list and was identified as one of the buildings in the worst condition by Concord Square. A second property, also condemned, was being reviewed for this program but since it is actively being marketed for sale, is not a serious contender. The Office of Planning & Development is looking into other properties for possible inclusion in this program.

Another program which is just getting underway is the Housing Ownership Opportunity Program (HOOP), in partnership with the Twin Cities CDC. Geared toward first time homebuyers, applicants must take the CDC's first time homebuyers course, be income-eligible (earn 80% or less of the area median income), and have the financial resources to make a 5% down payment on the home. The program is targeting foreclosed properties in poor condition that need significant rehabilitation. The City and CDC will identify a local contact for bank owned foreclosed properties, and through negotiations will obtain a commitment for 80% financing (of the total cost of the purchase plus rehabilitation costs). The remaining 15% will be contributed by the City of Leominster using HOME funds.

Leominster officials are also planning to apply for funds under the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, a federally funded initiative that will be administered by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development. However, these funds are targeting the hardest hit communities across the state, and as discussed earlier in this report, Leominster has not been affected as much as many other communities have been. Nonetheless, it is prudent to continually research opportunities for funding directly related to housing rehabilitation, as well as demolition for those few cases where replacing a particularly bad structure with a pocket park or small parking lot is more sensible. CDBG funds can be used for demolition, and the City should consider doing so if banks which own unsellable homes will donate them to the City.

A multitude of other opportunities exist and new ones are being created all the time as individuals, organizations, and governments are figuring out new methods to help stabilize the local and broader economies during this recession. Among these are MA Housing Partnership's Neighborhood Stabilization Loan Fund, which

allows non-profit or for-profit developers to purchase and rehabilitate properties in lower income neighborhoods for re-sale to homebuyers, and a new Housing Ownership Opportunity Program being developed by the MA Housing Partnership and MassHousing.

The public improvements proposed by this report (see Section 3.3) are expected to have the effect of dramatically improving the appearance of the neighborhood, and of stimulating private investment in the neighborhood. Together, these improvements should have the effect of increasing the values of all properties in the neighborhood.

There is a business opportunity for private investors in such an environment. It is plausible that it would be feasible and profitable for a group of private investors in Leominster to raise a limited amount of capital and organize a systematic program of property acquisition, renovation, and sale to individual homebuyers. The properties would be one to four family dwellings, and would primarily, but not exclusively, be sold to first time homebuyers.

If 20 investors would each invest $20,000, a pool of $400,000 would be available to carry out such a program. These funds would be supplemented with conventional property acquisition/construction loans from local banks. Ideally the investors would be from Leominster, and would represent individuals with substantial expertise in all aspects of carrying out the proposed transactions, such as realtors, appraisers, construction managers, and bankers.

A limited liability corporation would be formed to carry out the program. The investors would all be members of the LLC, and a managing board of the members would be designated. The managing board members would have the requisite experience to oversee the operations of the activity. In addition, it would be necessary to have a skilled employee to manage the operations of the undertaking. This employee may or may not be full time. Of key importance to the success of such an undertaking is the design and institution of the proper management controls and financial reporting systems.

The LLC, working with the City, would identify key properties to be acquired, and the necessary renovation work would be specifically designed to position each building for a projected buyer profile. The work may include new or upgraded kitchens, bathrooms, heating systems, electrical wiring, and roofs, plus repainting, floor refinishing, landscaping and other cosmetic improvements.

Once renovated, the properties would be immediately sold to buyers – in many cases first time homebuyers who, with appropriate counseling could acquire properties with two to four units, allowing the rental units to reduce their overall cost of housing to a quite reasonable level.

In such a program, the decisions on which buildings to purchase are the most critical with regard to ultimate profitability. All of the following information would be prepared prior to the purchase of the property, and would be reviewed and approved by the Managing Board of the LLC.

- The value of the building, both before and after renovation must be accurately assessed. Serious problems with the structure or mechanical systems (heating, plumbing, or electrical) must be identified and the cost of such renovations must be thoroughly understood.

- A detailed renovation work write-up would be completed, including a detailed cost estimate. Photographs would be taken of the current condition of the property. The cost estimate and work list should be reviewed by a home inspector or general contractor, who could offer a written opinion as to its reasonableness.
- A careful analysis of comparable sales in the neighborhood would be conducted, and an evaluation/comparison of the proposed purchase property to other sales made in a rigorous fashion.

- An appraisal would then be obtained from a third party appraiser to confirm the current market value of the property, as well as the value of the property after the renovation is complete.

The LLC's employee would line up a group of sub-contractors to work on the properties. These would include subcontractors who specialize in heating, plumbing, electrical, roofing, rough and finish carpentry, ceramic tile, carpet, hardwood floor installation and refinishing, lead paint removal, and others.

A real estate broker would be used to manage the sale of the properties after the renovation is completed. It may be possible to negotiate special relationships with one or more brokers that would result in reduced commissions based on the opportunity for repeat sales.

The key to the success of this program would be the efficient, cost effective, and rapid completion of the renovations to each building – ideally within 50 to 75 days after the purchase of the building. This will make it possible to have the building sold within 90 to 120 days of purchase.

In order for such a plan to be successful, it is critical that financial control systems and management systems be instituted so that the Managing Board is fully aware at all times of the status of each of the properties. It is also essential that the financial systems have a cost allocation element that enables the overhead of the LLC to be correctly allocated to each property that is sold – enabling an accurate assessment of the amount of profit that is earned.

It is believed that such a program could be successful and contribute substantially to long term improvements in the neighborhood. It would provide one small, but important piece of the overall neighborhood improvements – renovation of some of the properties in the neighborhood in poor condition that most homebuyers would not consider purchasing. In concert with other private investments and the public investments to be discussed later, the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood would increase in desirability and value.

3.2 Other Uses/Buildings

As was discussed previously, there are a number of nonresidential properties within the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood, many of which are in good condition and have appropriate landscaping for their surroundings. Map 8 (page 31) shows nine properties which Concord Square found are in need of some degree of attention ranging from demolition and rehabilitation to minor landscaping or façade improvements. On Map 8, the balloon text boxes are color coded for the degree of need – pink is a critical need, and includes those properties described in Section 2.5 as being in the worst condition; light orange denotes properties with moderate needs; and yellow boxes denote properties with minor needs. These are briefly described on Map 8; the following offers a more thorough explanation:

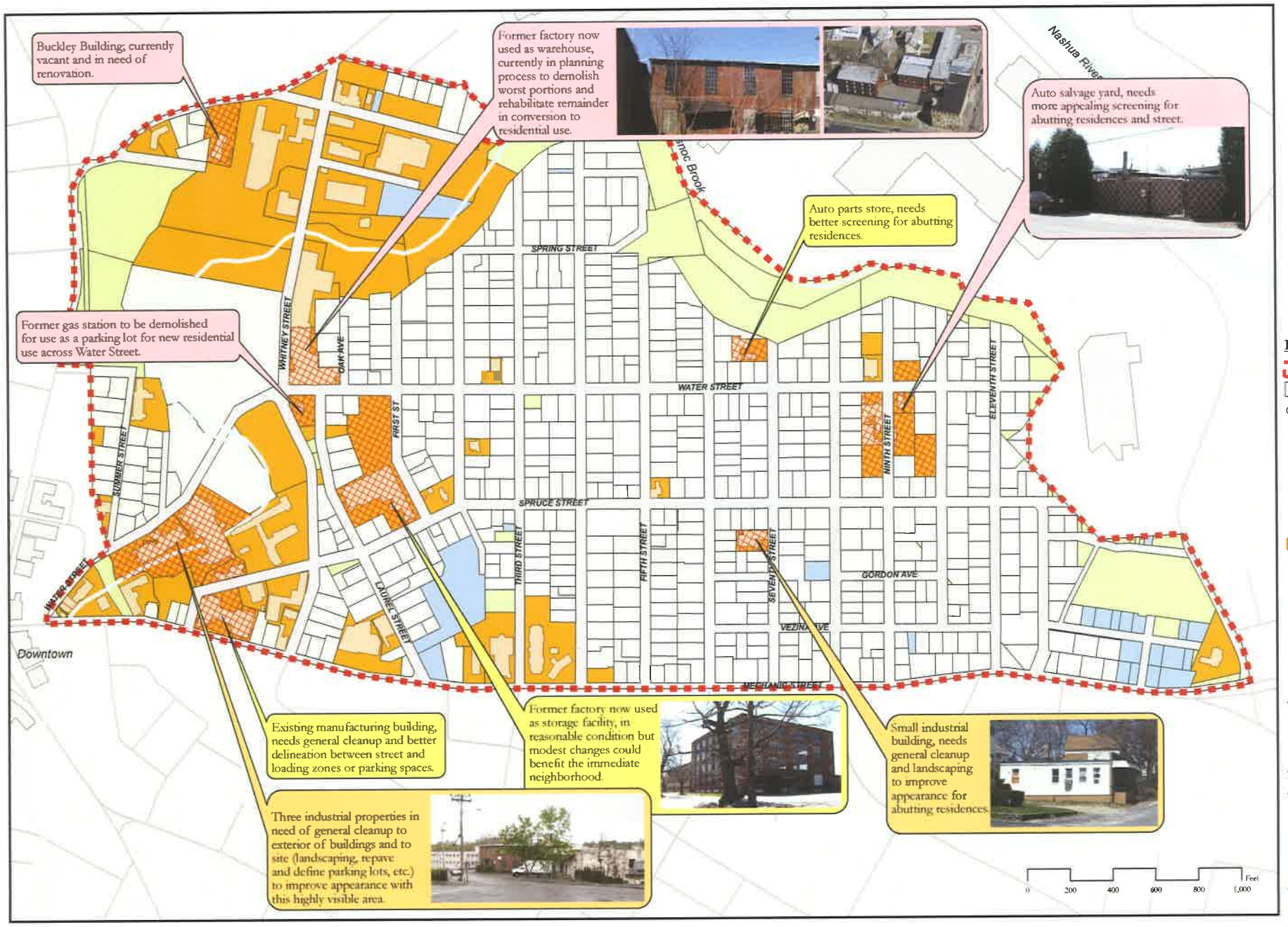
Critical Need

- **142 Water Street**, aka the "Hartman" building: Apparently neglected for years, this property is currently considered to be in the worst condition of all properties within the neighborhood. It likely has caused lower property values for the residences in close proximity and has a detrimental impact on the entire neighborhood, given its prominent location at the corner of Water Street and Whitney Street. Recently the Twin Cities Community Development Corporation secured approval for demolition of the masonry and metal building and complete rehabilitation and conversion of the old mill building (used as a warehouse) to a residential building with 40 units of affordable housing. Figure 22 shows the portion of the building that would be renovated (footprint of roughly 16,000 square feet), built in 1890. The project has been approved under MGL Chapter 40B, with full support by the City and broad support by the neighborhood. The abandoned gas station on the opposite side of Water Street is planned to be a parking lot for this project. Twin Cities CDC has a purchase and sale agreement with the current owner, and funding has been applied for with the hope of construction beginning in 2010. Other than general support of the CDC's efforts with this project and indirect help through infrastructure improvements to be discussed later in this report, no additional action by the City is needed.

Figure 22

- **34 Tremaine Street** is a vacant wooden mill building which appears to be structurally sound but is in need of substantial façade improvements to present a better appearance. The owner of this property has submitted preliminary sketches to the City for a renovation project which would either create office or retain the industrial space. The City should work with this applicant to ensure the proposed renovation project is completed.

- **37 Ninth Street** is an auto salvage yard established 83 years ago, before much of this section of the neighborhood was developed and before zoning was adopted in Leominster (1944). Out of 15 surrounding residential properties, two thirds were built after the salvage yard was established. While it appears that the residents in the area are comfortable with the use, and the yard itself appears to be kept in orderly condition, it is not unreasonable to conclude that property values might be higher if the use was either not there or was better screened from the residential properties surrounding it. The average assessed value for these 15 properties, all of which are single or two family, is $210,000, while the average assessed value for all single and two family properties in the study area is $219,000. If some simple and relatively inexpensive measures were taken to improve the aesthetics of the property, it could have a positive impact on the immediate neighborhood. With all property except for



City of Leominster MA
Gateway Plus Grant

Comb & Carriage/French Hill
Nonresidential Recommendations

Legend

- Study Area Boundary
- Parcels

Current Land Use:

- Residential
- Nonresidential
- Open Space
- Vacant
- Roads
- Nonresidential Buildings
- Properties Needing Attention
  - Critical Need
  - Moderate Need
  - Minor Need

Sources:
Leominster DPW;
Assessor's Office;
MassGIS

1 inch = 400 feet

July 27, 2009

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Ninth Street and Water Street running through the salvage yard in private ownership, there is little the City can do to improve buffering between the yard and abutters. The City should, however, include these portions of Ninth and Water Streets in their plans for sidewalk improvements to be discussed in the next section.

Moderate Need

- **75/85 Water Street and 26 Spruce Street**, three industrial properties just outside the downtown and in close proximity to two mill conversion residential complexes. These three sites function as a single site in regards to traffic, parking, and visual appearance, with a main driveway through the site from Spruce Street to Water Street. Two are large industrial buildings: 75 Water Street is a 20,000 square foot two story brick and masonry building built in 1920, and 85 Water Street is a 109,000 square foot three story concrete and cinder block building built in 1905. Both have substantial façades along Water Street, and other than some entry way landscaping and some trees, there is no landscaping or even any delineation between the street/sidewalk and loading or parking areas. From Spruce Street, the complex presents itself as nothing but pavement and plain buildings, most with little or no architectural interest, although the older portion of 75 Water Street has large arched window openings which have been filled and smaller windows inserted (see Figure 23). Along Water Street, both properties could be cleaned up and perhaps painted to present a more aesthetically pleasing façade for residents of the area as well as anyone traveling on this road which leads into the downtown. The City should reset the granite curbing and rebuild the sidewalks in this area – see more information in the following section on infrastructure.

- **139 Seventh Street** is an 8,000 square foot one story concrete/cinder block building built in 1910, completely surrounded with residential properties. Having been built prior to zoning enactment in Leominster, the building is less than 10 feet from any property line and occupies over 60% of the parcel. All but one of the residences were built after this industrial property was established, and

Figure 23: *Windows at 75 Water Street.*

that one has been converted into a six unit apartment building. As with the auto salvage yard on Ninth Street, it is possible that the presence of this small industrial building has kept property values on the low side, although the average assessed value for these 13 properties is nearly $253,000 – significantly higher than the average value for all residential properties of 1 to 8 units in the study area, which is $239,000. Nonetheless, if the property was cleaned up the overall impact on the neighborhood would likely be reduced, especially for the properties directly across Seventh Street, which have an average assessed value of $211,000. The City can help by including Seventh Street in the infrastructure improvements discussed in the next section.

Minor Need

- **11 Spruce Street** is a 32,000 square foot one and two story concrete/cinder block and wood frame building built in 1920. This property is generally in good condition, but the street edge blends into the loading and parking areas, and clear delineation between the two would improve the area.

- **123 First Street** is a 39,000 square foot former shirt factory that is now used as a warehouse. After sitting vacant for many years, this building has been improved and is not such a detriment to the neighborhood. However, a portion of the building has boarded up windows which is not particularly suitable for a residential area. Replacement of these with real windows would help the appear-

ance of the immediate neighborhood, although it is understood that there needs to be a realistic and appropriate use for the building as well as an economic climate that can support the renovations. The City should include First Street in their plans for infrastructure improvements as will be discussed in the next section.

- **3 Seventh Street** is a 6,000 square foot one story auto parts store built in 1950, six years after zoning was adopted in the City. While the buildings on this property extend essentially to the property lines on three sides and the fourth (fronting on Seventh Street) is almost entirely paved, this property owner appears to have done what he can to reduce the impact of his commercial use on the surrounding residential uses. At the end of a dead end street, it is likely that the only people who see this property are the customers and the abutters across Seventh Street. Creation of a clear delineation between the street and the parking lot with a landscaped strip to provide some buffering of the business from the direct abutter, and a clear entrance to the parking lot, would help further improve this property.

In addition to these properties, which are identified as nonresidential by the City Assessor, there are a number of small businesses located in mixed use buildings (with residential units). Most notable among these is a Laundromat at 262 Water Street (Figure 24). Small neighborhood oriented businesses such as this and small markets – Desilet's at 174 Spruce Street, Bourbeau's at 190 Water Street, and J&D Spanish American Market at 104 Mechanic Street – help keep a neighborhood healthy by providing some of the services residents need in a location easy to get to on foot, bicycle, or if need be, by car. The Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood used to have more of these types of small businesses, and the opportunity exists for new ones to open. Notably, the area at Spruce and Third Streets is zoned for business use; this once was a thriving neighborhood commercial pocket. However, properties have fallen into various states of disrepair and with the lack of parking and many of the neighborhood residents leaving the neighborhood for all their shopping and service needs, there is currently little incentive for new businesses to locate here. The City, through the Code Enforcement and Fire Departments, does everything within its jurisdiction to maintain the safety of buildings for the residents of the City.

Figure 24

3.3 Neighborhood Infrastructure

A key component of a vibrant and healthy neighborhood is a well defined and well maintained interface between the public and private environments. This is accomplished with well maintained street edges as well as appropriate lighting, landscaping, and street furniture that comprise the overall streetscape. Different areas of the neighborhood have varying needs for streetscape; what is appropriate on a low density residential street will differ from what is appropriate in a commercial area. Likewise, the streetscape in a small commercial pocket within a neighborhood should blend with the surrounding residential area yet provide a more interesting environment that will help attract customers to the businesses. The Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood includes five distinct streetscape types with different needs:

- low density residential, where tree lined streets dominate and traffic volume is low;
- higher density residential, where cars play a greater role in the overall appearance and sidewalks are crucial for pedestrian safety due to higher traffic volumes;
- neighborhood commercial pockets, where both transition to and differentiation from the surrounding residential uses is needed to better define

Figure 25 and 26: *Before and after visualization on Laurel Street.*

the commercial pocket;

- major commercial areas, where sidewalks, landscaping, and public spaces (benches, pocket parks) are important to create a pleasing and safe public environment; and
- industrial areas, where the potential for conflict with surrounding uses is greater and the need for screening is high.

As was seen in Section 2.6, there are many streets within the neighborhood where there is no clear demarcation of the street edge. This causes a conflict between the "vehicle space" and the "pedestrian space", resulting in vehicles gradually infringing on the pedestrian space – as evidenced by cars parked in the dirt along the side of the road, and in the worst cases on the sidewalk. This creates a gray area where property owners are unsure where their responsibility ends and the City's begins. In some areas this is fairly clear, but in others it is less so. In addition, often times in neighborhoods such as this, property owners will mow the grass and otherwise care for the strip between the street and the sidewalk. Where vehicles are constantly encroaching on this strip, property owners understandably ignore it.

The installation of curbing takes care of some of these issues by creating a clear edge to the street, a barrier to parking off the street pavement, and an area where grass or other vegetation (low groundcover) can grow. It also improves safety for pedestrians on the sidewalk, as the likelihood of a car being driven off the road is reduced, provided the curb height is great enough to alert the driver the car is leaving the road. Figures 25 and 26 show a "before and after" visualization of one

Figure 27 & 28: *Before and after visualization on Second Street.*

section of the sidewalk on Laurel Street, and Figures 27 and 28 show a section of Second Street.

After the field surveys and input from residents, Concord Square has determined that improvements to the public/private interface throughout the neighborhood will have the greatest positive impact toward stabilizing the neighborhood of possible public actions. Table 2 (page 38) and Map 9 (page 39) present the Action Plan for neighborhood infrastructure. The overall goal is to improve the public pedestrian infrastructure throughout the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood to create a more walkable environment which will encourage more pedestrian activity while enhancing property values.

The Action Plan calls for improvements that will result in both sides of every street having concrete sidewalks and granite curbing, in some cases with a strip of grass between the curb and the sidewalk. It is recognized that there may be some streets where it is not necessary to build sidewalks on both sides due to low demand, as well as some areas where it is not desirable to build them due to the presence of large trees when alternatives cannot be found (easements on private property to go around large trees, alternative methods of construction to protect tree roots, etc.). The action plan can be summarized as follows:

- 4.6 miles of new sidewalks on streets where no sidewalk currently exists;
- 3.9 miles of sidewalk replacement, including granite curbing, where existing sidewalks are in poor condition;
- 2.9 miles of sidewalk repair, including installation of granite curbing, on sidewalks in moderate condition;
- 4.2 miles of new granite curbing where sidewalks are in reasonable condition but curbing is absent or ineffective (insufficient height difference between street surface and top of curb);
- 23 crosswalks to be repainted or painted;
- 0.9 miles of sidewalk improvements on Water Street at the downtown gateway (refer to separate action plan for more details)
- 1.1 miles of trail construction or improvement to the Monoosnoc Greenway (refer to separate action plan for more details);
- improve street lighting in three areas; and
- restrict on-street parking to one side only.

Some additional comments are warranted on a couple of these issues:

In regards to the conflicts between sidewalks and trees, it has been observed that there are areas of the neighborhood where large trees have been cut down, apparently due at least in part to buckling sidewalks. It is widely recognized that trees are an asset, especially in residential areas, and can add significant value to private property. It is also widely recognized that sidewalks are highly desirable in residential neighborhoods. Research has been done on the issue of how to plan, design, and construct sidewalks to minimize future damage by tree roots, as well as on methods to protect existing trees and plan for adequate growing room for new trees. A brief search on the internet has found two promising construction techniques for dealing with repair or reconstruction of existing sidewalks in areas with large trees, and certainly there are many more. While the cost of such construction techniques may be slightly higher than standard construction, the benefits of reduced buckling from tree roots and preserving the tree canopy outweighs the added costs. Techniques include routing the sidewalk around a tree (the minimum width for an ADA compliant sidewalk at an obstacle such as a pole or tree is 32 inches), building a ramp over existing tree roots using top soil and a suitable base for the new concrete sidewalk[1], using specially designed joints[2] which allow adjacent sections of a sidewalk to move together as roots grow, and use of a different type of base material that provides larger pores for tree roots[3].

1 Healthy Trees, Smooth Sidewalks, by George Gonzales, Chief Forester, Bureau of Street Services, City of Los Angeles, CA. Published in Tech Transfer Newsletter, Winter 2007

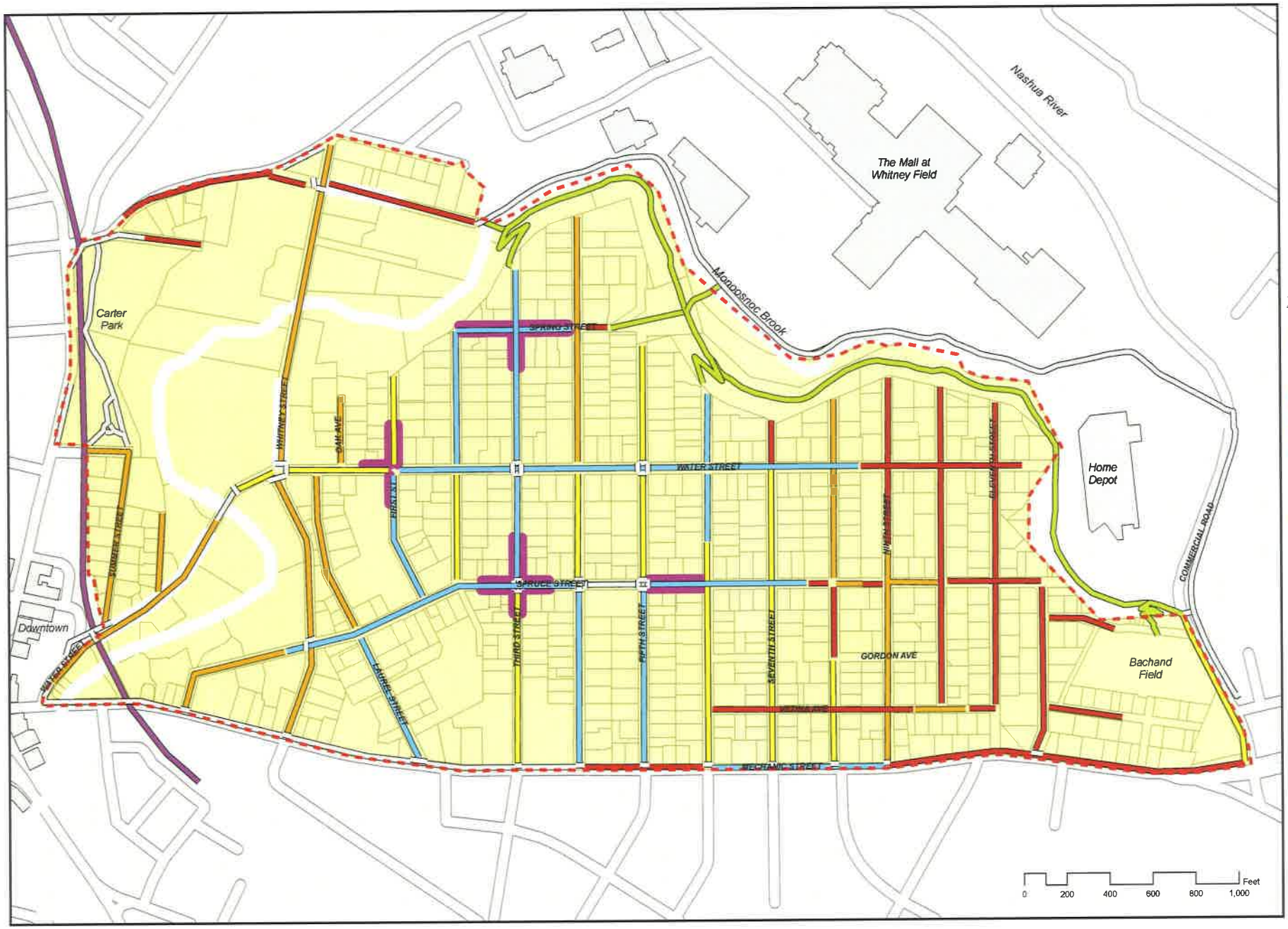
2 TripStop™ Articulating Sidewalk Joint System, www.tripstop.net

3 Shoot and Root Growth of Three Tree Species in Sidewalks, J. Grabosky et. al., Dept of Horticulture, Cornell University, Ithaca NY. Published in the Journal of Environmental Horticulture, Dec. 2001.

Table 2:
Neighborhood Infrastructure Action Plan

Goal: To improve the public infrastructure throughout the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood to create a more walkable environment which will encourage more pedestrian activity while enhancing property values.

	Improvement	Purpose/Explanation
1.	Build new sidewalks (concrete with granite curbing) where none currently exist. There are approximately 4.6 miles (counting both sides of each street) in this category, with an estimated cost of $1.8 million (including labor and materials).	The Comb & Carriage neighborhood was designed with a grid street system which enhances the walkability of the area. The eastern section of the neighborhood lacks sidewalks, and while traffic is minimal on most of these streets, the addition of sidewalks and curbing would improve not only the safety but the aesthetic quality of the neighborhood. Some of these should have sidewalks on both sides, but many would likely be fine only on one side and granite curbing alone on the other.
2.	Rebuild sidewalks where existing sidewalks are in very bad condition. New sidewalks would be concrete with granite curbing. There are approximately 3.9 miles of sidewalks in this category, with an estimated cost of $1.5 million.	There are several areas in the neighborhood with sidewalks in such a poor state that they are unsafe for use, forcing pedestrians to walk in the street to circumvent these areas. There are additional areas where the sidewalk is still safe for use but is in poor condition and reconstruction is more appropriate than repair. Also included in this category are a few streets with sidewalk in poor condition on one side and no sidewalk on the other side of the street.
3.	Repair sidewalks where existing sidewalk is in reasonable condition but which have small sections in need of resurfacing or otherwise addressing existing problems. This includes installation of granite curbing. There are approximately 2.9 miles of sidewalks in this category, with an estimated cost of $822,000.	With relatively little funding, the sidewalks in this category could be improved to excellent condition, thereby enhancing the walkability of the area.
4.	Add curbing where none currently exists, whether along the edge of a sidewalk directly abutting the street or along the edge of the street where there is a grass strip between the street and the sidewalk. There are approximately 4.2 miles in this category (counting both sides of the streets), with an estimated cost of $986,000.	Curbing along the edge of the street, whether directly adjacent to the sidewalk or not, improves the visual quality of a streetscape, improves the flow of storm water runoff to existing catch basins, and prevents vehicles from parking off the road on either the grass strip or directly on the sidewalk. These improvements not only enhance the safety of the pedestrian environment, but the aesthetic quality of the neighborhood, increasing property values.
5.	Improve crosswalks at key intersections in the neighborhood. There are 23 intersections in need of improved pedestrian crossing facilities; some are repainting existing crosswalks while others are installing new ones.	Safe pedestrian crossing facilities – crosswalks and pedestrian lights at signalized intersections – are an important element in the overall pedestrian system. Most intersections in the neighborhood (there are 57 in the study area) do not require formal crosswalks, given the low traffic volumes using them. Those specified in the accompanying map, however, warrant crosswalks and signage warning drivers of potential pedestrians in the crosswalk.
6.	Establish a more welcoming entry to the downtown area by making various improvements to the streetscape on Water Street between Summer Street and Mechanic Street. (Please refer to the Depot Square/Downtown Gateway Action Plan for detailed information.) There are approximately 0.9 miles in this category, with an estimated cost of $549,000 (not including landscaping).	The current connection for vehicles and pedestrians to the city center is functional but not attractive and certainly not welcoming. By making a variety of improvements, this area can be safer and more aesthetically pleasing, and a new pocket park in the old railroad right-of-way could serve as a beginning point for the Twin Cities Trail, a proposed rail-trail running between Leominster and Fitchburg.
7.	Create the Monoosnoc Brook Greenway (please refer to that Action Plan for detailed improvements information). There is approximately 1.1 miles in this category, with an estimated cost of $296,000.	The formalization of this passive recreational facility will enhance the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood by establishing safe pedestrian connections with the employment and shopping centers on the opposite side of Monoosnoc Brook and providing a 1.9 mile loop trail on both sides of the brook for the enjoyment of all residents.
8.	Improve street lighting where it is currently inadequate – only three small areas.	Adequate lighting along the streets is important to safety, although light levels should not be so bright as to create a nuisance for residents. The vast majority of the neighborhood is adequately lit but consistent maintenance is important – two adjacent burned out lights could create a significantly darker area than the rest of the neighborhood, making it uncomfortable for pedestrians at night. A 750 foot section of Water Street, a 400 foot section of Whitney Street, and a 350 foot section of Williams Street are the only areas in need of better street lighting.
9.	Restrict on-street parking to one side only.	While this is not a physical improvement, the majority of streets in the study area are too narrow (with a 50 foot right-of-way and anywhere from 22 to 33 feet of pavement width) to allow two cars to pass each other comfortably when there are vehicles parked on both sides of the street (parked correctly, with all four tires on the street). This causes drivers to pull off the road onto the grass strip or worse (and illegally) the sidewalk itself, creating passage and safety problems for pedestrians. By restricting parking to one side only, this issue vanishes. Only four areas were seen during daytime and evening surveys where significant on-street parking was taking place; in those locations people without off-street parking may need to walk a little further to their destination with one side only parking.



City of Leominster MA
Gateway Plus Grant

Comb & Carriage/French Hill Neighborhood Infrastructure Action Plan

Legend

- Study Area Boundary
- Parcels
- River or Brook

*Improvement: **

- Build New Sidewalk
- Rebuild Sidewalk
- Repair Sidewalk
- Add Curb
- New Crosswalk
- No Action Needed

Recreation Trails:

- Monoosnoc Brook Greenway **
- Twin Cities Trail (Future)

*Other Infrastructure Needs: **

- Inadequate Street Lights
- On-Street Parking

** As determined by CSP&D based on field surveys in April and May 2009.*

*** See Monoosnoc Greenway Plan.*

Sources:
Leominster DPW, Assessor
MassGIS

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While most of the 55 intersections in the study area have low enough traffic volumes that crosswalks are not necessary, there are 20 that do warrant formal pedestrian crossing facilities. One, at the intersection of Water Street and Whitney Street, has a traffic signal and warrants a pedestrian crossing signal as well. This traffic signal is old and will be difficult to replace based on the cobblestone construction of the old underlying street in that location. A less costly solution could be to install a separate pedestrian light that is activated by a push button; however it needs to be electronically connected to the traffic light to avoid conflicting light patterns for drivers.

Based on field observation regarding parking on the street, the recommendation to limit on-street parking to one side of the street will not impact many people. However, if the City decides to revisit the on-street parking policies, consideration should be made for commercial establishments located at street corners. Often, cities will prohibit parking within a certain number of feet of an intersection, to assist drivers with sight distances down intersecting streets. This is not necessarily recommended in this neighborhood for a couple of reasons – it would eliminate all parking adjacent to several business locations, impacting customers, and allowing cars to be parked to the corner can serve as an informal traffic calming method – drivers are more apt to proceed with caution (i.e. slowly) if they do not have excellent visibility up and down intersecting streets.

To estimate the cost of the recommended improvements presented in the action plan, two sources were used: the Massachusetts Highway Department's online Construction Project Estimator and a report published by the Vermont Agency of Transportation, Shared Use Path and Sidewalk Unit Costs, February 2006. Using distances for the various categories in the action plan, total cost estimates were calculated. A wide variation was found between the MassHighway tool and the Vermont report, with total costs $3 million more using the Vermont data. It should be noted that those costs were from 2005 and it is understood from conversations with Public Works professionals that today's costs are lower, although probably not that much lower. Table 3 presents a summary of the estimated costs for construction of sidewalks with granite curbing throughout the neighborhood, broken down by the action plan categories.

The Leominster DPW Director has informed Concord Square that the DPW has the capability and capacity to do all sidewalk construction and curb installation, and that if the projects are done that way then the City can expect the above figures to be reduced by one half to two thirds. Using the MassHighway estimate of $5.16 million as an accurate reflection of the current costs of materials, it can be expected that the total "out of pocket" cost of all this work would be roughly two million dollars. Obviously the City would also be paying the labor and related costs for the DPW employees, but even factoring that in the total cost will be less than the MassHighway estimate since that estimate includes labor at prevailing wages.

It is unrealistic to assume that all of these projects would be or could be completed in one year; the City needs some way to prioritize the projects and split the overall action plan into smaller parts that can realistically be completed in a year, given constraints on funding and labor availability at the DPW. Map 10 (page 43) shows one suggestion, based on the primary purpose of the sidewalk segments. Concord Square reviewed the

Table 3 – Summary of Cost Estimates for Sidewalks and Curbing

Category	Length (in feet)	MassHighway	VT AOT Report	City DPW Estimate
Build New Sidewalk	24,405	$1,813,000	$3,417,000	$604,000 - 906,500
Rebuild Sidewalk	20,759	$1,542,000	$2,906,000	$514,000 - 771,000
Repair Sidewalk	15,098	$ 822,000	$ 604,000	$274,000 - 411,000
Add Curb	22,147	$ 986,000	$1,218,000	$328,600 - 493,000
Total:	88,604	$5,163,000	$8,145,000	$1,720,600 - 2,581,500

various sidewalk segments and based on location and what geographical areas were accessed or connected by each, assigned them to four categories: Downtown Connections, Central Core, Greenway Connections, and Other Sidewalks. It should be noted that this is only one suggestion, other ways to prioritize would be by the degree of repair needed (as shown on the Action Plan), or break the neighborhood down into smaller geographic areas (e.g. First through Fourth Streets one year, Fifth through Eighth Streets the next year, etc.).

Downtown Connections:

Nearly every property is within one mile (by walking routes) of the downtown, and over forty percent of the housing units are within one half mile of the downtown. A dramatic increase in pedestrian activity to the downtown could be expected if these sidewalks were improved and the streetscape enhanced to make the walk from this neighborhood safer and more attractive. These sidewalks, which are in various levels of improvement (please refer to Map 9, Infrastructure Action Plan, on page 39) are the primary sidewalks that lead into the downtown area from the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood. There are 2.5 miles of sidewalks in this category, with an estimated cost for the various levels of repair/rebuilding at $935,000 (including labor and materials).

When these sidewalks are in a state of disrepair, then regardless of the condition of sidewalks elsewhere in the neighborhood, it is less likely that residents will choose to walk to the downtown. Additional recommendations can be found regarding the streetscape approaching downtown in Section 3.4 on the Downtown Gateway Action Plan. The section of Whitney Street leading from Water Street to Mill Street, toward the Whitney Field Mall, is also included in this category since like the downtown, the mall area is an important center of employment and commercial activity; the existing sidewalk on the west side of the street is in need of rebuilding and there is currently no sidewalk on the east side. The sidewalk on Mechanic Street was rebuilt recently and is in excellent condition.

Central Core:

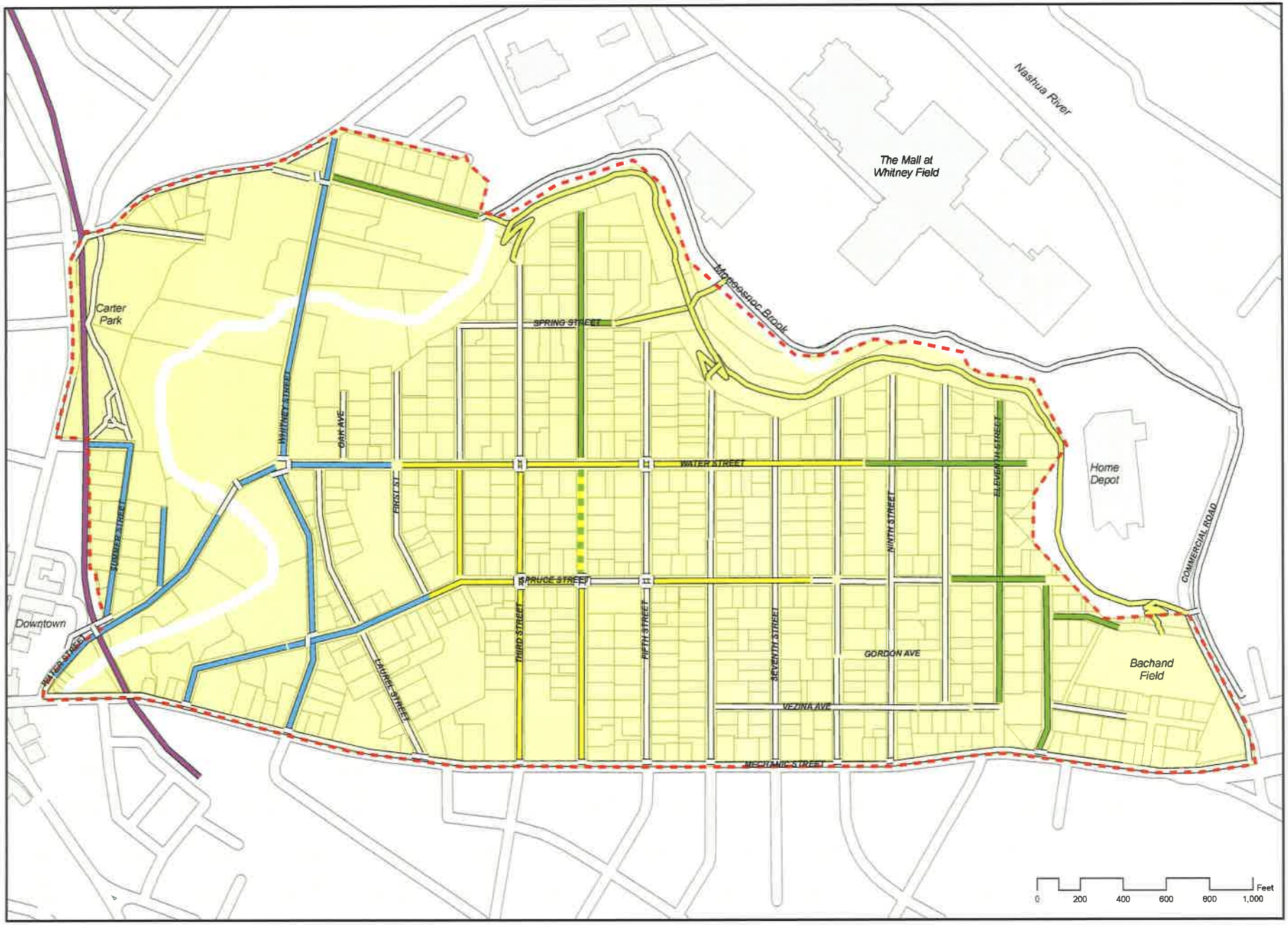
These are the sidewalks in the "core" area focused on Spruce Street and Water Street from Laurel Street to Eighth Street, and including the Business B zoning district at the intersection of Spruce Street and Third Street. These sidewalks have the potential for more pedestrian activity than many of the side streets, and therefore should be a higher priority for improvement. There are 2.8 miles of sidewalks in this category, with an estimated cost for the various levels of repair/rebuilding at $689,000 (including labor and materials).

Greenway Connections:

These are the sidewalks that lead from most areas of the neighborhood to the proposed access points to the Monoosnoc Brook Greenway at Williams Street, Third Street, Spring Street, Sixth Street, and Bachand Field (on Hillside Street). As will be discussed in Section 3.5 on the Greenway Action Plan, the Greenway has tremendous potential for becoming a valuable recreational resource for the residents of the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood. For that to happen, however, there needs to be safe and convenient pedestrian access to the greenway from the neighborhood. With many of the streets in the eastern section of the neighborhood without sidewalks at this time, there are safety concerns, especially for families with children and elderly residents. Other streets in this category have sidewalks that are in disrepair and should be improved to allow the greatest number of residents to take full advantage of the Greenway. There are 2.3 miles of sidewalks in this category, with an estimated cost for the various levels of repair/rebuilding at $886,000 (including labor and materials). It should be noted that if the Monoosnoc Brook Greenway Action Plan is not pursued for some time, the sidewalks in this category should be included in the next category.

Other Sidewalks:

These are all the sidewalks (or streets without sidewalks) in the study area that are not included in one of the previous three categories. Some of these segments are either missing or in poor condition and it may be prudent for the City to include such sections in work plans for the higher priority categories discussed above, but generally these sidewalks/streets can be given a lower priority. If the Greenway Action Plan is not pursued, it would be sensible to create additional priority categories for this "Other Sidewalks" category, perhaps based on degree of need and condi-



City of Leominster MA
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Comb & Carriage/French Hill
Neighborhood Infrastructure
Priority Plan

Legend

- Study Area Boundary
- Parcels
- River or Brook

Priority Locations: *

- Downtown Connections
- Central Core
- Central & Greenway
- Greenway Connections
- Other Sidewalks

Recreation Trails:

- Monoosnoc Brook Greenway **
- Twin Cities Trail (Future)

* *See Action Plan table for further information.*

** *See Monoosnoc Greenway Plan.*

Sources:
Leominster DPW, Assessor
MassGIS

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tion of sidewalks as opposed to geographical location. For instance, there should be sidewalks to lead from the core section of the neighborhood all the way out Spruce Street and on Twelfth Street and Hillside Street to provide a safe pedestrian facility to Bachand Field. Likewise, completing the sidewalk on the north side of Mechanic Street would improve pedestrian safety along this busy road.

Concord Square recommends that the Downtown Connections be given the highest priority, and the Greenway Connections categories be given a high priority as well, along with the Monoosnoc Brook Greenway (to be discussed in Section 3.5).

3.4 Downtown Gateway

As mentioned earlier, Downtown Leominster is within a half mile walk for over forty percent of the residential units in the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood, and within a one mile walk of the rest. However, pedestrian activity along Spruce, Water, and Mechanic Streets leading from the neighborhood to the downtown is minimal. This is partly due to lingering fears and attitudes about personal safety based on the past, and partly due to a marginally safe and unappealing appearance of this gateway to the downtown. Issues which Concord Square has identified contributing to this include:

- undefined sidewalks in some locations, particularly where the sidewalk crosses a parking lot with minimal space between the street edge and the building
- sidewalks with inadequate vertical separation from the street, resulting from repeated paving of a street which eventually brings the street level closer to the top of the curb
- lack of sidewalk sections, leaving a pedestrian "abandoned"
- lack of crosswalks
- overgrown vegetation encroaching the sidewalk
- broken or heaved sections of sidewalks, creating trip hazards and an impediment to disabled people
- poorly defined curb cuts into private property
- unscreened trash receptacles or utilities (e.g. dumpsters, HVAC units)
- parking lots extending from the edge of the sidewalk to the edge of the back of buildings, creating a sea of pavement broken only by the type of impervious surface (concrete sidewalk, granite curb) from one side of the street to the buildings on the other side of the street
- lack of landscaping, sandy or muddy patches, some with sparse growth of grass or weeds

All this adds up to an unpleasant walk from the neighborhood to the downtown, whether on Whitney and Spruce Streets or Water Street. The Mechanic Street sidewalk was rebuilt recently and is in excellent condition, although landscaping is limited – primarily provided by private property owners, some of whom have done an excellent job of beautifying their area.

To address these issues, Concord Square has developed the Downtown Gateway Streetscape Action Plan, which can be seen in Table 4 (page 46) and Map 11 (page 47). Please note that these recommendations are presented in order from east to west, and not in any priority order.

The first and most basic recommendation is to rebuild sidewalks which are in poor condition, and to fill in the areas where no sidewalk currently exists. While most of this area has existing sidewalks, some are concrete and some are asphalt, and virtually all are in poor or very poor condition. Numerous segments have buried

Figure 29: *Example of an area where a flush sidewalk needs better delineation to clearly show pedestrians and drivers where the sidewalk is.*

Table 4: Downtown Gateway Action Plan

Goal: To provide a more aesthetically pleasing and safer pedestrian environment along the streets leading from the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood to Downtown Leominster, and to create two pocket parks on the old railroad bed in conjunction with the future Twin Cities Trail and Monoosnoc Brook Greenway.

1.	Repair or rebuild sidewalks along the section of Water Street from the Monoosnoc Brook bridge to Mechanic Street.	
		Nearly all of the sidewalks in this area are in need of reconstruction and many also need curbing to be reset. Some areas should have sidewalks built flush with the surrounding pavement to allow continued vehicular access to parking or loading areas. Length of sidewalks to rebuild is 1,088 feet, with a cost estimate of $150,000 including labor and materials (approximately $50,000 if Leominster DPW does all construction).
2.	Install new crosswalks at all intersections.	
		Formal pedestrian crossings are crucial to ensure the overall pedestrian system is safe and to encourage more pedestrian activity through this area. The Depot Square area is in dire need of crosswalks, given the existing 215 foot span between the sidewalk at the Summer Street intersection and the sidewalk on the west side of Depot Square. This also includes the crosswalk on Water Street at the Mechanic Street intersection. Length of crosswalks depends on whether the next recommendation is implemented: ❖ If no, total of 340 feet of 6 foot wide crosswalks, at a cost estimate of $12,000; or ❖ If yes, total of 250 feet, at a cost estimate of $9,000.
3.	Reconfigure the intersection at Depot Square to narrow the side street and create a pocket park.	
		This recommendation would help to improve pedestrian safety and the appearance of this entry to the Gateway area. See text for full explanation. Cost estimates were not prepared for this recommendation given the variability in potential designs and details (benches, landscaping, etc.).
4.	Create a pocket park on the former railroad bridge and right-of-way between Water Street and Mechanic Street.	
		If a park was created that encompassed a pedestrian walkway from Mechanic Street to Water Street and that took advantage of the architectural beauty of the stone arch bridge over Monoosnoc Brook, the combination of this and the pocket park on the north side of Water Street would provide a wonderful entry to the Downtown Gateway at this junction of the entry to downtown, the Monoosnoc Brook Greenway, and the Twin Cities Trail. Cost estimates were not prepared for this recommendation given the variability in potential designs and details (benches, landscaping, paving materials, etc.).
5.	Provide better delineation of entrances to parking lots and install small landscaped areas to improve the appearance of Water Street near Mechanic Street and to improve pedestrian safety.	
		To create a positive impression for drivers and pedestrians entering the downtown from Water Street, some well designed and well placed landscaping could help to soften the appearance of the parking lots, utility areas, and buildings. This would also improve safety for pedestrians by providing a clear delineation between the pedestrian and vehicular facilities. Cost estimates were not prepared for this recommendation given the variability in potential designs and details (landscaping, fencing, land costs if required).

City of Leominster MA
Gateway Plus Grant

Comb & Carriage/French Hill
Downtown Gateway Streetscape
Action Plan

Legend

- Study Area Boundary
- Existing New Sidewalk
- Buildings

Recommended Improvement:

- Repair or Rebuild Sidewalk
- Rebuild Flush Sidewalk
- New Crosswalk
- New Landscaping
- New Park

Sources:
Leominster DPW, Assessor
CSP&D

1 inch = 100 feet

July 29, 2009

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Map 11

curbing which needs to be reset with sidewalk reconstruction, to provide a better vertical separation between the sidewalk and the road. This is illustrated in Figure 29. Several segments cross parking areas where the sidewalk essentially disappears, leaving both drivers and pedestrians uncertain as to who should be where (see Figure 30). In those areas, denoted by a dotted line ("rebuild flush sidewalk") on the action plan, a sidewalk should be built that is either flush with the surrounding pavement or that has a slight and rounded rise which would be easily driven across, and is constructed of or lined with a different and contrasting material or color. In areas with existing trees, appropriate sidewalk location and construction techniques should be utilized to preserve the trees, given the general lack of vegetation in this area.

In conjunction with reconstruction of the sidewalks, and to provide safe road crossings, new crosswalks should be installed to clearly delineate the pedestrian right-of-way. If appropriate, a non-asphalt material or stamped asphalt pattern should be used instead of simple painted lines, to clearly differentiate the crosswalk and to identify the area as a gateway to the downtown, especially if the City used the same crosswalk treatment throughout the entire downtown. Signage warning drivers of approaching crosswalks should also be installed, along with signage reminding drivers that they must stop for pedestrians within the crosswalk.

Figure 30: *Example of granite curbing that has gradually been buried in the roadway; this would be remedied with new concrete sidewalks and elevating the curbing to provide separation.*

Figure 31: *Existing conditions at Depot Square.*

Currently a pedestrian approaching Depot Square from the east is faced with a 215 foot expanse of pavement and dirt with no crosswalks, clearly an unsafe condition for pedestrians. See Figure 31; the red line indicates this area. By reconfiguring the street and intersection, enough land area can be converted to create a pocket park which would have a much better appearance and provide a safer means of crossing this area on foot. This would involve the incorporation of the small island in the middle of the intersection into the park, as well as the elimination of several parking spaces that are too close to or within the intersection on both sides of the existing street. By expanding the existing parking lot that is within the former railroad right-of-way and painting new lines to delineate parking spaces, at least three spaces can be relocated to this lot. Note that the property line between the retail business and railroad right-of-way is the boundary of the study area. Figure 32 (page 50) shows the existing conditions (aerial image) with the proposed concept with notations of recommended changes. Figures 33 and 34 show a "before and after" simulation of what this new pocket park and reconfigured intersection could look like.

Depot Square derived its name from the old railroad depot located here – one of the former railroad buildings still stands and is currently a retail establishment. The rails have been removed from this abandoned section of the rail line, which once ran to the adjoining city of Fitchburg. Plans are underway to convert this former railroad bed to a pedestrian and bicycle trail connecting the two cities – the Twin Cities Trail. While plans currently call for the Twin Cities Trail to begin/end at Carter Park, it would be prudent to consider extending it the additional 600 feet to connect Depot Square to Carter Park.

The old railroad bed continues on the opposite side of Water Street and extends to Mechanic Street. A stone two-arch bridge crosses Monoosnoc Brook in this location, and the surface of the bridge is unpaved with some grass and weeds growing along the sides of a pedestrian-worn path. Figures 35 and 36 show the existing conditions of this bridge. A large section of the railroad right-of-way south of the bridge is being used for parking, loading, and some storage for the industrial use to the east of the former tracks – utilizing loading bays that date back to the days when the railroad was active. Both the consultants for this project and the consultants for the Gateway City Parks Program – Monoosnoc Brook Walk project have recommended that this section of abandoned right-of-way be converted into a pocket park. Figure 37 shows the schematic design drawing prepared by Brown, Richardson, and Rowe, Inc. for the Gateway City Parks Program. This plan is precisely what the authors of this report had anticipated for the street level of this park.

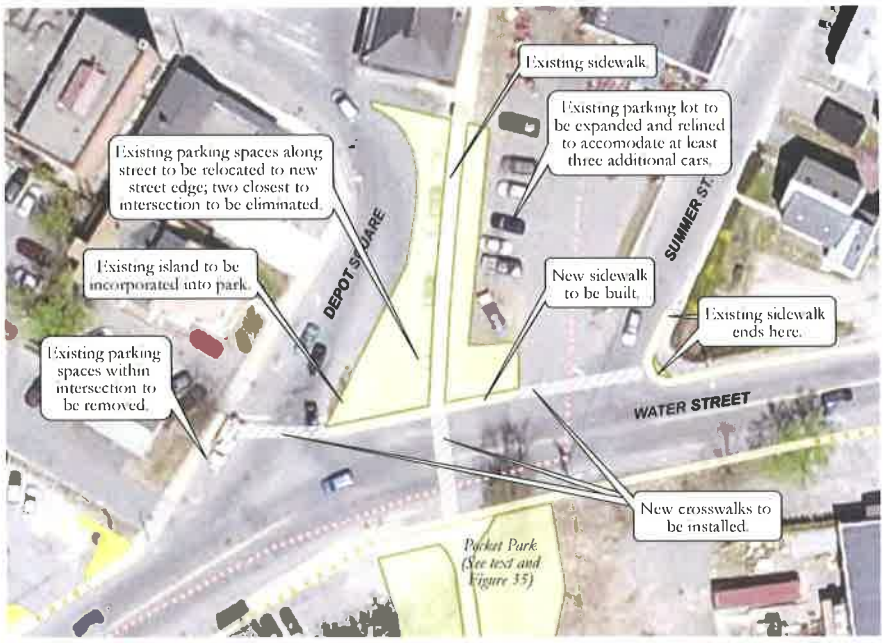
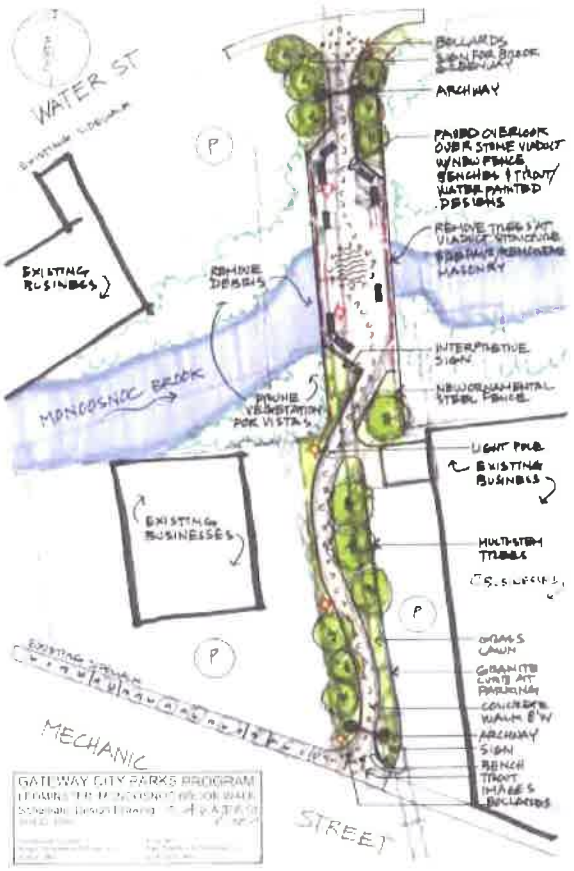


Figure 32: *Conceptual view of Depot Square pocket park. CSP&D's recommendation is to reduce the amount of pavement, close the north bound lane, eliminate on-street parking on the south-bound side to allow sufficient width for two lanes of traffic, and create a park area with landscaping and benches for people to enjoy.*

While this schematic design addresses debris and vegetation issues under the bridge, Concord Square also recommends that thought be given to building a staircase down to the river, or to a view point partway down the slope, to allow people to see the beautiful stone arch bridge and to enjoy the water from a closer proximity. Space is somewhat limited, and concerns

Figure 33, Left: *Existing conditions at Depot Square.*
Figure 34, Right: *Conceptual view of Depot Square pocket park. CSP&D's recommendation is to reduce the amount of pavement, close the north*

Figure 37: *Schematic design drawing of pocket park on the former railroad bridge, prepared for the Gateway City Parks Program, Monoosnoc Brook Walk project.*



for safety must come into play, but the idea should be given consideration rather than dismissed, given the architectural asset that the bridge provides.

Creation of a park such as this, along with the recommended reconfiguration of the road and creation of a pocket park on the north side of Water Street, would create a wonderful entry to the Downtown Gateway, as well as a place for people to gather. If the old railroad station were converted to a café or informal restaurant, the park would provide some outdoor seating space for the warmer months, adding to the activity in the immediate area and the general interest and vitality of the broader area. Entry and wayfinding signage should also be utilized to identify the area as one of the Downtown Gateways, as well as provide informational and directional signage for both the Twin Cities Trail and the Monoosnoc Brook Greenway extending into the downtown. The City is fortunate to have this opportunity to create a wonderful public space that ties these different elements together.

Proceeding further down Water Street toward Mechanic Street and the downtown, pedestrians are faced with numerous curb cuts, and little or nothing to screen utility areas, parking lots, or the backs of buildings on Main Street, and on the south side of Water Street, nothing to differentiate the parking area from the sidewalk (see Figure 38). The appearance of this stretch of Water Street is unpleasant, and as the key connection between the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood, gives a negative impression of the area. To reverse that and create a positive impression for drivers

Figure 35: *Existing conditions of the southern portion of the pocket park recommended for the old railroad bed; this is the portion on the stone arch bridge.*

Figure 36: *Stone arch bridge (former railroad bridge).*

and pedestrians, the action plan recommends that both sidewalk/curbing and landscaping improvements be made.

It is recommended that the City and the two banks in this area work together to provide four areas on their parcels where landscaping and iron fencing could be installed. This would involve some reconfiguration of parking lots; reduction in parking spaces should be limited to just a few through careful design and re-lining parking spaces. This would not screen, but would soften the visual appearance of the existing parking lots, utilities, and the backs of the buildings. Well maintained landscaping would draw the eye and greatly improve the impression that drivers or pedestrians would have passing through this area. Figure 39 shows an example of what this area could look like if the sidewalks were better defined with new (or re-installed) granite curbing and some landscaping. This sample matches the layout shown in the action plan (Map 11), which was designed to provide better definition of entry and exit driveways on the two bank properties, as well as to screen the dumpster currently located in the corner of the parking lot directly adjacent to Water Street.

Figure 38 : *Existing conditions of the gateway on Water Street.*

Figure 39: *Conceptual view of what the gateway to Downtown Leominster might look like if the parking lots behind the banks fronting on Main Street were to be screened with a little landscaping and the sidewalks rebuilt or repaired with clearer delineation of where the sidewalks are. As depicted in this photo, this project would require a partnership with the property owners and some minor shifting of parking spaces in the existing parking lots.*

3.5 Monoosnoc Greenway

Monoosnoc Brook flows through the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood and along the northeastern boundary of the study area between the neighborhood and the commercial area around Whitney Field Mall. As early as 1738 the brook provided power to mills, allowing the City to prosper with businesses such as the F.A. Whitney Carriage Company. The brook was largely ignored and abused until the late 1980's, when in 1987 The Monoosnoc Brook Greenway Project (MBGP) was formed as a part of the Nashua River Watershed Association to clean up the garbage and debris and turn the brook into an asset. The brook and its shores now provide habitat for fish, herons, muskrats, white tail deer, and a variety of other wildlife. The MBGP sponsors numerous activities including annual clean-up events attracting up to 50 volunteers, educational programs including school field trips and an outdoor classroom, planting of spring bulbs, an art contest, and a winter festival.

Just outside the study area, in Downtown Leominster, the Greenway includes park areas and walking trails, and with the generosity of Home Depot, a walking trail has been established along the brook from Commercial Road to Williams Street, behind the commercial developments on the northeast side of the brook (see Figure 40). In the upper reaches of the brook outside the study area, there is a trail that connects to the 10 mile long Monoosnoc Ridge Trail. A small grant was awarded by the MA Department of Fish and Game in 2008 to identify all the property owners along the

Figure 40: *Greenway trail behind mall.*

brook as one of the early steps in creating a contiguous trail system. A grant from the Gateway Cities Park Program was awarded in 2009 to develop plans for the section of the brook in the downtown, from Adams Street to just downstream of the old railroad bridge off Water Street. That project is developing detailed schematic design drawings for several parks in that area, including the old railroad bridge in the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood (discussed in the previous section).

As this report goes to press, a joint effort of the Leominster Parks Department, Conservation Commission, and the Trustees of Reservations has produce new trail maps which include 25 miles of trails throughout Leominster. Using color coding as well as numerical markers on both the maps and the trails, people can now easily follow the trails and know where they are on the map – very helpful for public safety officials in locating and reaching people in need of assistance. These maps are a valuable tool and will help promote trail use throughout the city, including the section of the Monoosnoc Brook Greenway discussed in this report.

At the confluence of Monoosnoc Brook with the Nashua River, just outside the study area, there are currently no formal trails. However, there is a trail project on the Transportation Improvement Program for the region for the Nashua River, and perhaps in the next decade this long planned project will get underway. When it does, the Monoosnoc Brook Greenway should be tied into that trail, further extending the recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

In order to promote pedestrian activity and to take advantage of the opportunity the Monoosnoc Brook Greenway provides the area, Concord Square has studied the area to consider how improvements within the study area can further enhance both the Greenway and the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood. Table 5 (page 54) and Map 12 (page 55) detail the Monoosnoc Brook Greenway Action Plan, which would create a 1.9 mile loop which could be accessed in numerous locations, encouraging frequent use by a wide variety of people. The total estimated cost of these improvements would be $300,000, although if flooding issues require more substantial bridges (estimated at $75,000 each), the cost could be higher.

In addition to the recommendations in the action plan, one of the first and least expensive actions should be to perform a major clean-up of the hillside and areas along the trail, in addition to the brook and its banks. As discussed earlier in this report, there are many spots along the trail and especially the upper reaches of the slope from the neighborhood where dumping of yard debris and trash has occurred for decades (see Figures

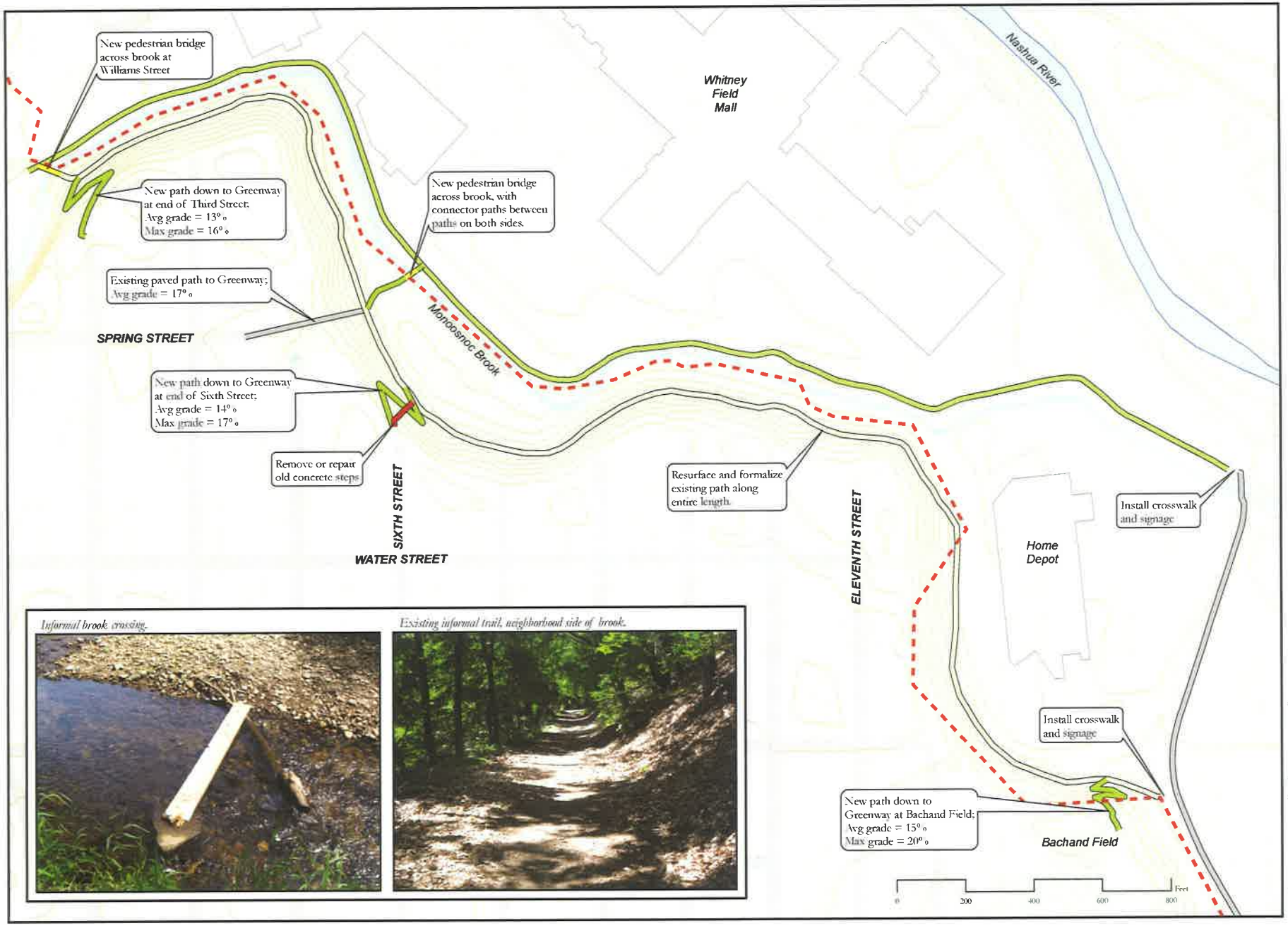
Figure 41: *Some trash could have hazardous materials.*

Figure 42: *Shopping carts in the brook.*

Table 5: Monoosnoc Brook Greenway Action Plan

Goal: To extend the Greenway path to both sides of Monoosnoc Brook to create a 1.9 mile loop trail system with access in multiple locations for the enjoyment of neighborhood and City residents.

1.	Construct a new path from Third Street to the Greenway path, and construct a pedestrian bridge across Monoosnoc Brook at the end of Williams Street.	
		To provide safe access from the west-central part of the neighborhood down to the Greenway path, and to provide a safe facility for crossing the brook to access the shopping and employment centers on the opposite side of the brook as well as the existing sidewalk along the mall side of the brook. This includes roughly 300 feet of new pathway, and including the bridge, would have an estimated cost of $100,000.
2.	Construct a new path from Bachand Field to the Greenway path.	
		To provide safe access from this recreation area to the Greenway path, allowing alternative modes of transportation from some sections of the neighborhood to the ball fields as well as providing a passive recreational facility for the neighborhood and City residents to enjoy. This includes 250 feet of new pathway at an estimated cost of $12,500.
3.	Resurface the Greenway path (existing trail over sewer line) and improve path and drainage as needed.	
		To formalize the Greenway path and provide an even surface free of drainage problems and other impediments. There are a few areas of the existing pathway along the brook on the mall side that also need resurfacing. At 4,720 feet, the cost estimate is $72,000.
4.	Construct a pedestrian bridge across Monoosnoc Brook near the Spring Street access point, including new pathways between the bridge and Greenway path on both sides of the brook.	
		To provide a safe facility for crossing the brook directly behind the mall, allowing easy access to the employment and shopping centers in that area from the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood. Including roughly 175 feet of new pathway and the bridge, the cost is estimated at $100,000.
5.	Construct a new path from Sixth Street to the Greenway path, and rehabilitate the old concrete steps in this location.	
		To provide safe access from the east-central part of the neighborhood down to the Greenway path, and to replace the upper section and repair the lower section of the existing concrete steps, which have fallen into disrepair and are hazardous (missing handrail, dirt filled stairs, upper section askew). This includes roughly 200 feet of new path and repairs to the stairs, with an estimated cost of $12,000.
6.	Install new crosswalks across Commercial Road at both ends of Greenway path.	
		To provide facilities to enhance the safety of pedestrians crossing Commercial Road from the sidewalk on the east side of the road to the Greenway path on the west side of the road. At 100 linear feet of crosswalk, with a simple painted surface, the cost estimate is $2,000.



City of Leominster MA
Gateway Plus Grant
Comb & Carriage/French Hill
Monoosnoc Brook Greenway
Action Plan

Legend

- Study Area Boundary
- City Owned Open Space
- Existing Sidewalk
- Existing Pathway
- Resurface Path
- New Bridge
- New Path
- Remove Steps
- Elev. Contours (10' Interval)
- River/Brook

Sources:
Leominster DPW;
Assessor's Office;
MassGIS

1 inch = 250 feet

July 22, 2009

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41 and 42). Volunteers, including neighborhood residents, local groups such as the East End Neighborhood Association, Spanish American Center, Monoosnoc Brook Greenway Project team (which is responsible for the success of the 22 annual brook clean-up events to date), school groups, scouting groups, community service organizations, and the like can be recruited for this work, with assistance from the City for removal of large items (refrigerators, old cars) and for pick-up and disposal of all items removed from the area.

Design and engineering work should be minimal for this project, as the main part of the trail already exists on the sewer line, and is kept in good condition by the City. New trails snaking down the steep slopes from the neighborhood at the top of the hill, rehabilitation of the old concrete staircase, and the two pedestrian bridges will require design work. The trail sections should be designed by a firm with experience in trail construction to ensure they are at an appropriate grade and will not create erosion problems or become hazardous with excess wear or informal "cut through" trails. Figure 43 shows the existing informal trail from Third Street, Figure 44 shows the upper section of the old concrete stairs at Sixth Street which need to be replaced, and Figure 45 shows the lower section, which is in reasonable condition and could be cleaned up and repaired.

Figure 43: *Path from Third Street.*

Figure 44: *Steps at Sixth Street, upper section.*

Lighting of this section of the Monoosnoc Greenway was considered, but at this point it is not recommended to incur the expense to do so. Solar powered fixtures would not be effective here given the significant tree cover of the area, thus power would need to be run the entire length of the trail and up each of the connector paths. Light fixtures in a relatively remote location such as this would be targets for vandalism, further increasing costs. While it can be argued both ways whether lighting such a facility would attract or prevent people from congregating and potentially engaging in inappropriate or illegal behavior, a less expensive and more effective technique is to have regular police patrols along the trail and to encourage a high level of use by area residents. The higher the volume of use of such a facility, the less desirable it is for people to chose to engage in inappropriate behavior.

Another concern raised by residents is the presence of insects. Insects are a natural part of any stream eco-

Figure 45: *Steps at Sixth Street, lower section.*

system; the City should not attempt to eliminate them and residents should not expect a bug-free environment. Instead, insect populations can be controlled by removing the trash and debris piles, where rainwater can accumulate in anything that holds water and become breeding grounds for mosquitoes and such. Piles of yard debris can also harbor many flying insects and should be kept to a minimum on private property and not at all on public property. Low areas where storm water drainage collects can be a problem, but there are numerous ways to deal with that issue including proper vegetation and maintenance. The City should examine the low area between the brook and trail just downstream of the Spring Street access to determine what measures should be taken to minimize mosquito populations that might be breeding there. Figure 46 shows an informal bridge crossing an intermittent stream leading to this low area on the right.

If all of these recommendations are implemented, this beautiful pathway would open up recreational opportunities to the neighborhood residents as well as provide pedestrian access to the shopping, services, and employment center across the brook. Combined with the previously discussed sidewalk improvements, the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood has the potential to revive its "ahead of its time" New Urbanist roots and become the most walkable and one of the most highly desirable neighborhoods in Leominster.

Figure 46: *Low area and bridge.*

3.6 Financial Analysis of Infrastructure Recommendations

As was seen in Table 3, the cost estimates for the recommended infrastructure improvements vary widely, from $1.7 million to $8.1 million, depending on whether the City utilizes their own DPW for labor and on which data source is used for cost estimates (MassHighway or VT AOT). Concord Square performed a financial analysis of the recommended actions to determine whether they are feasible and what the long range impact might be on the neighborhood and the City.

Table 6 presents an analysis of the potential increases in property values if all the recommendations in the action plans are implemented. These increases are based on both improvements to the public sector infrastructure and improvements made by property owners to their own private property.

It is assumed that the City's commitment to make and then carry out the public improvements will substantially change the perception of the neighborhood in a positive way. It will become a more attractive and desirable place to live. The installation of curbs and the improvements to sidewalks will stimulate new landscaping at the street edges of people's properties. The mud and ruts that currently predominate because of the lack of curbs will be replaced by grass, flowers and other plantings – all as a result of private initiative and private investment. There will be increased recreational opportunities along the Monoosnoc Brook, and there will be more park areas. These improvements will be self-reinforcing, such that the more things look better, the more people will want to make their own contribution by improving the appearance of their own property. People will also be more willing to make investments inside their homes to improve kitchens, bathrooms, heating and air conditioning systems – even to add additions to their properties. They are more likely to paint, add decorative fences or shutters and in general improve the appearance of their properties. Thus the carrying out of the program will stimulate private investment that would otherwise not occur.

The analysis in Table 6 has been prepared in order to make an estimate of the potential amount of such im-

Table 6 - Potential Property Value Increases & Tax Revenue Generation

Private Sector Improvements

	# Properties	# Units	Improved Units @ 50.0%	Investment Per Unit	Total Investment
Residential Uses	565	1,673			
Single Family	215	215	107.5	$20,000	$2,150,000
Two Family	154	308	154	$15,000	$2,310,000
Multifamily, incl boarding house	196	1,150	575	$10,000	$5,750,000
				Total New Investment:	**$ 10,210,000**
Equals increase in Property Values of:				85.0%	$8,678,500
Property Tax Rate (FY09, assume no change)					$12.03
Increase in Property Taxes from Private Sector Improvements:					**$104,402**

Public Sector Improvements

Total Assessed value, all residential properties:	$ 155,738,500	
Assume all properties increase in value over 5 years by:	5.0%	
Increase in Value over 5 years:		$7,786,925
Property Tax Rate (FY09, assume no change)		$12.03
Increase in Property Tax by Public Sector Improvements:		**$93,677**

Summary

Increase in Property Tax Collections from Private Sector Improvements:	$104,402
Increase in Property Tax by Public Sector Improvements:	$93,677
Increased Property Tax Revenues:	**$198,079**

provements, and to estimate the impact on property tax assessments and property tax receipts over a period of time. The neighborhood has 565 residential properties which contain 1,673 dwelling units. It is assumed that that over a five year period, directly as a result of the increased confidence in the neighborhood stemming from the public investment, the owners of one half of the properties will make improvements to them, using their own private funds. We have estimated that the average amount of investment per home would be $ 20,000 for each of the single family homes that is improved; the average amount for each unit in a two family home would be $15,000; and the average amount for all other apartments would be $10,000. This would result in total new private investment of $10.2 million by property owners. Keeping in mind that only half of the properties will see improvements at all, it is probable that some owners would invest significantly more in their property than the average amounts given in the table, while others will invest less. Further, it is assumed that only 85% of the value of the total investments would ultimately result in increases in assessed values for the properties. This would result in an increase in the assessed value for the neighborhood of $8.7 million. Applying the FY09 tax rate of $12.03 yields a potential increase in tax revenues directly resulting from these individual property improvements of $104,400. This amount would build as the neighborhood improves, and would reach this level towards the end of the five years.

In addition, it is likely that the overall package of improvements – the $3,000,000 paid for by the public, plus the $10,000,000 paid for from private investment funds – will increase the desirability of the neighborhood substantially, and that this will result, over time, in an increase in property values for all properties.

For purposes of this analysis, it has been assumed that there would be a general increase in property values of 5%. This figure is at the lower end of the likely range of from 3 to 10 percent. Applying a 5% increase to the overall property value of residential structures of $155.7 million (as of December 2008, for the 2009 fiscal year and based on calendar year 2007 arms length sales), the increase in value expected over five years is $7.8 million. This would yield an increase in property tax revenues of $93,700 annually, towards the end of the five year period (again assuming the FY 09 tax rate of $12.03).

If this amount is combined with the increase in tax revenues from private sector property improvements, the City could receive an increase in tax revenues from this neighborhood of $198,000.

Concord Square also performed an analysis of the costs and potential sources of funding for the infrastructure improvements. Table 7 shows a breakdown of the total costs which are estimated at $3 million, including design, engineering, and contingency funds. Concord Square believes that the benefit of the various infrastructure projects will make a significant contribution to the neighborhood primarily after they are all completed and the pedestrian system allows a resident to safely and comfortably walk to the Downtown, the Whitney Fields Mall and surrounding commercial area, and the Monoosnoc Brook Greenway. As pointed out earlier in the report, it is not realistic to complete all the work in one year, especially if the City's DPW will be doing much of the construction. Therefore, Concord Square recommends that the entire set of recommendations presented in the three action plans (neighborhood infrastructure, downtown gateway, and Monoosnoc Brook Greenway) be planned for a three to five year implementation time frame.

However, Concord Square also recommends that the funding be obtained up front to the maximum extent feasible, and materials such as granite curbing be purchased and stockpiled to take advantage of volume prices – provided there is adequate space for stockpiling.

Table 7 also presents a funding proposal, which suggests an equal cost sharing between the City and the state or other sources. The City would pay for approximately $1,500,000 out of the total needed of $3,000,000. If the City were to raise the $1,500,000 through a bond issue with a 25 year term and a 3.95% interest rate, the annual cost would be $94,500. This cost can be expected to be offset by the increase in property values and increased property tax payments, which, as set forth above, are estimated at $198,000. Therefore, based on these assumptions, the City would have a net increase in revenues of approximately $103,500 per year.

It is important to note that the increased costs for the debt service would take place early in the process, and the increased tax revenues would come only with time, over a three to seven year period, but would then continue indefinitely. And it is also important to note that the analysis is not necessarily predicting that actual revenues would increase by the amounts shown, only that they would likely be $200,000 higher than they would have been if the public improvements were not done.

Table 7 - Financial Analysis of Costs and Funding

Total Cost of Neighborhood Infrastructure Improvements:		
Curbs and Sidewalks		$2,000,000
Pocket Parks		200,000
Monoosnoc Upgrades		300,000
Landscaping and Street Trees		75,000
Design and Engineering @	4.0%	103,000
Contingency @	10.0%	267,800
Miscellaneous		54,200
		$3,000,000
Funding Proposal		
City Share - Bonding		$1,500,000
State / Other		1,500,000
Total Sources of Funds		$3,000,000
Cost of City Bonding - 25 years		
Bond Amount		$1,500,000
Interest Rate	3.95%	
Amortization	2.35%	
Annual Debt Service:	6.30%	$94,500
Summary, City Costs		
Increase in Property Taxes		$198,079
Less Debt Service		($94,500)
Net Benefit to City per year:		**$103,579**

4 ZONING REVIEW

A review of the current and proposed zoning was completed, which included an analysis of the existing property configurations and uses within the Comb & Carriage/French Hill neighborhood. This Section sets forth the findings of that review and analysis as well as the consultant's recommendations for possible modifications to the proposed zoning and amendments to the existing zoning. This analysis was provided to the City in early June, and after reviewing it with their Zoning Consultants (Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.), both the City and VHB are planning on modifications to the proposed zoning amendments as they move through the adoption process.

Figure 47 shows the existing zoning for the neighborhood. There are five districts within the neighborhood: Residential B, Residential C, Business B, Commercial, and Industrial.

Map 13 (page 65) shows the current land use along with the zoning. There are, according to City Assessor records, 215 single family, 154 two family, and 196 multi-family properties with a total of 1,673 dwelling units. For non-residential properties, there are 27 in commercial use, 22 industrial, 7 institutional, 3 parking lots, 41 municipal owned lots, including those along Monoosnoc Brook, and 43 vacant (privately owned) parcels. Parcel distribution among the five zoning districts is: 210 in the Residence-B district, 361 in the Residence-B district, 29 in the Business-B district, 16 in the Commercial district, and 88 in the Industrial District.

4.1 Existing Zoning

In addition to a general review of the permitted uses, Concord Square examined the dimensional requirements to determine if modifications would be appro-

Figure 47: *Zoning Map*

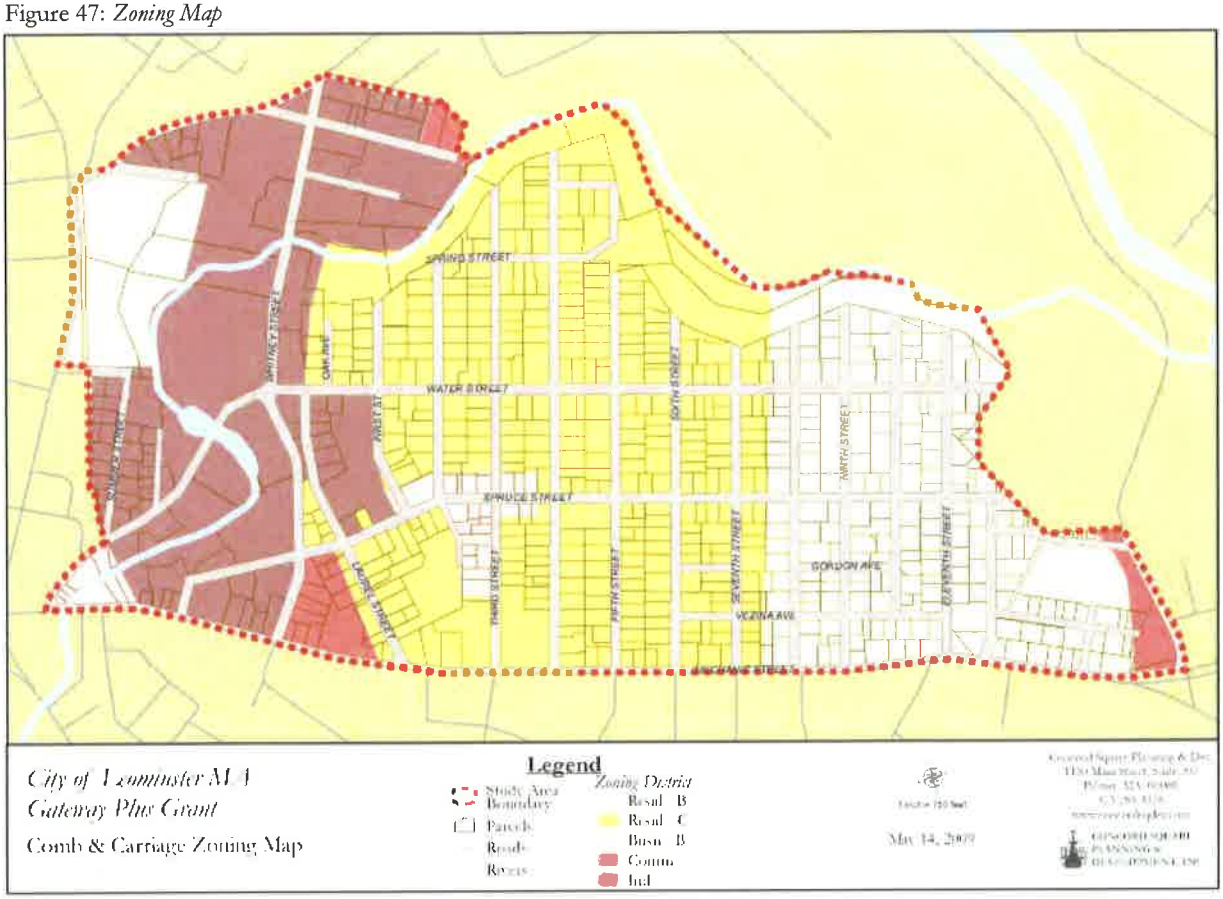
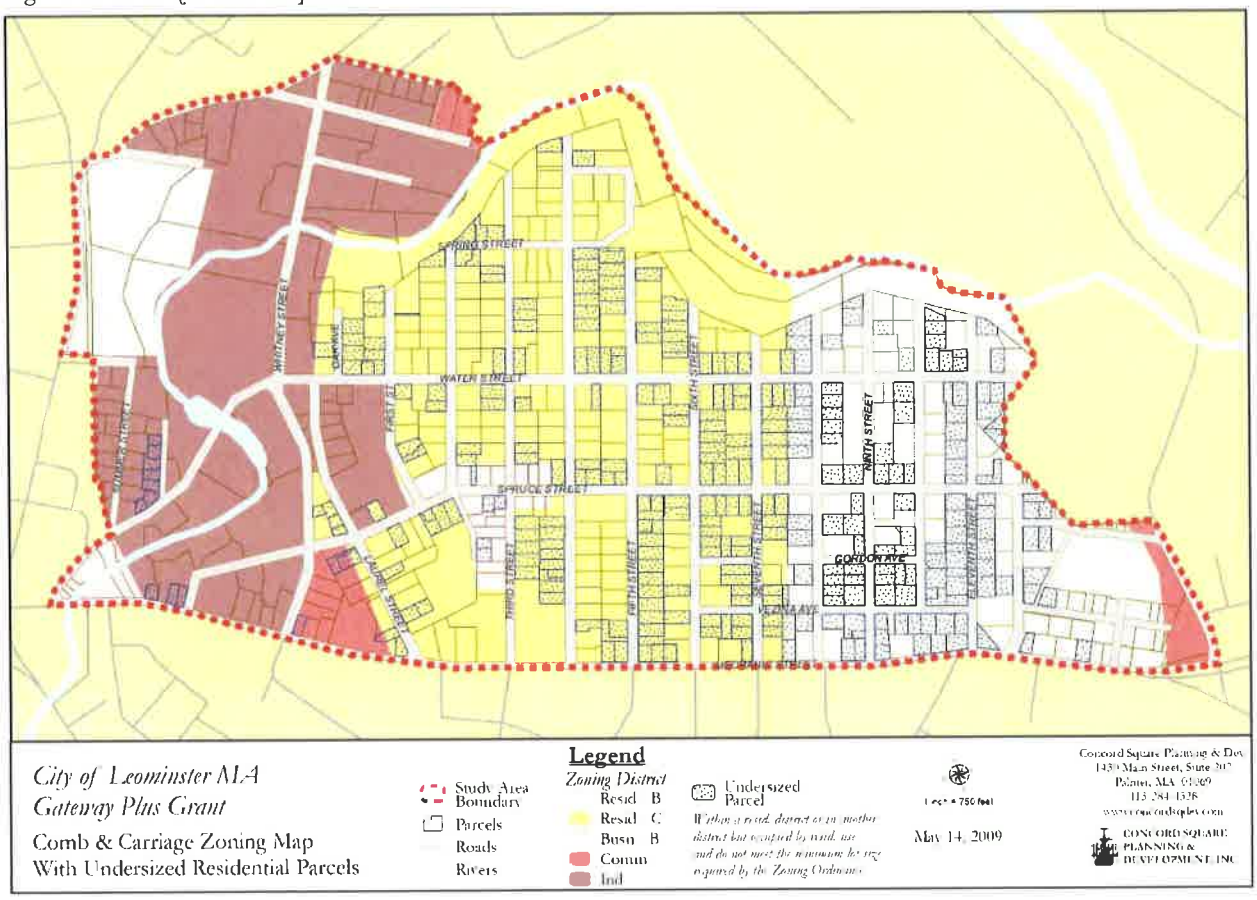


Figure 48 *Undersized residential parcels.*



priate to address a comment made at the neighborhood meeting on April 29 which implied the current regulations inhibit infill development. CSP&D's research finds that there are a substantial number of undersized lots in the two residential districts within the neighborhood, totaling 62% of the residential (492) or vacant (9) parcels (see Figure 48).

However, this is not that significant for modifications to existing structures, since the zoning ordinance is quite lenient in dealing with new construction on undersized lots of record as well as conversions of single family structures to 2 family or multi-family structures. Section 22-10.1 permits use of a recorded lot with any use permitted in the district provided the lot is at least 5,000 sf, has at least 50 feet of frontage, and side setbacks are at least 8 feet. This would allow construction of new single family residences on lots of at least 5,000 square feet that are either currently vacant or are occupied with structures destined to be demolished.

Section 22-12.3 permits extensions and alterations of existing structures on nonconforming lots without need for a special permit in all cases except when the proposed extension encroaches the required setbacks. This includes the conversion of single family structures to two family or multi-family. Since the use table permits conversions of single family structures to multi-family with an unlimited number of units, the addition of dwelling units in and of itself does not create a zoning conformance issue. This only applies to the conversion of single family structures; the addition of a dwelling unit to an existing two family or multi-family structure would not be permitted.

Concord Square has concluded there is a significant problem for the construction of new multi-family structures as infill. New construction of two family